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THE WOMEN'S VOTE AND THE TORY PARTY

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INTRODUCTION

On 27 November 1885, Lady Louisa Knightley, a prominent and active supporter of the Conservative Party, noted in her journal that when her husband went to cast his vote in the general election she 'waited outside and felt, for the first time personally, the utter anomaly of my not having a vote, while Joe Bull has!'[1] As a woman of property, education and some political influence, Lady Knightley felt more than qualified to possess a parliamentary vote, and it was the realisation of this apparent injustice which led her to take up the women's suffrage cause and become the first president of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA) in 1908. She had been interested in the idea of female enfranchisement ever since her cousins, Jessie and Louisa Boucherett, had talked to her about the rightness of the cause in the 1860s, and over the years she had become increasingly frustrated by the lack of recognition of the contribution women like herself could make to the good government of the country: 'The more I think about it, the more convinced I feel that it is only just that women should have the vote, and that many injustices under which they labour will never be removed until they do have it.'[2] Lady Knightley was not the only Conservative woman to become involved in the suffrage campaign, but as June Hannam has observed, the considerable amount that has been published on the British women's suffrage movement contains little about the contribution to the suffrage cause made by women who supported the Conservative Party during the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century.[3]

Hannam has identified organisations like the CUWFA as being 'neglected in standard accounts of the movement', while in his recent revisionist account of the women's suffrage campaign, Martin Pugh devotes a chapter to summarising Conservative attitudes to female enfranchisement and the contribution made by the CUWFA to the eventual achievement of

votes for women, and in his introduction he maintains that 'we have underestimated the conservatism and the Conservatism in women's suffrage, and thereby lost an important part of the explanation for the eventual success of the cause'.[4]

The British women's suffrage movement has been the subject of a considerable body of scholarship, particularly over the last thirty years. After a number of first-hand accounts from the viewpoint of its main participants, and the spate of autobiographical memoirs[5] which were published in the years before the Second World War, more recent work has concentrated on the individual suffrage organisations and the ideas and campaign strategies of their leadership, some of the lesser-known suffrage groups, and the complexity of suffrage politics.[6] Biographies of the leaders of the suffrage campaigns provide valuable insights into the driving forces which led these women to dedicate their lives to the cause of female enfranchisement,[7] while the process of uncovering lesser-known individuals who participated in the suffrage movement is a continuing project.[8] The links between suffrage and sexual politics,[9] suffrage and imperialism,[10] the distinctive history of the suffrage movement in the regions,[11] male involvement in the British women's suffrage movement and the phenomenon of anti-suffragism have all been the subject of important studies.[12] The difficult and often frustrating relationship between the various suffrage organisations and the political parties is discussed by Rover, Morgan, Pugh and Harrison.[13]

While some suffrage historians do include some reference to the contribution that Conservative women and men made to the women's suffrage campaigns, most of these accounts only mention Conservative suffragists either in the context of their support for the Conciliation Bills between 1910 and 1912, or where they co-operated with other suffrage societies in joint campaigning activities.[14] However, there is no doubt that a number of Conservative women were active in the suffrage movement from the earliest days, as important participants in the first women's suffrage committees, and later as members of the two most influential suffrage societies, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), and, to a much lesser extent, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), and as founders of their own organisation, the CUWFA, which held its first meeting in 1908.

Despite the shortage of material on Conservative women suffragists, there is a more substantial body of work on them within the membership of the party, particularly in the various accounts of the Primrose League, the popular mass organisation founded in 1883, which was designed to draw all

classes of people together to support the principles of the party and had a very considerable female membership. Janet Robb was a pioneer in this respect, and her work provides the basis for the valuable monograph by Martin Pugh,[15] which includes a survey of the various ways in which the women of the Primrose League were involved in the political life of the Conservative Party, and has a brief account of their attitude to the suffrage question. Pugh allows only a very moderate success for the political claims of women during this period, but he concedes the important point that by successfully working with men rather than in single-sex groups, Conservative women were able to quietly erode male objections to their participation in political life, and in so doing they 'sapped the strength of anti-suffragism where it might have been strongest'.[16] In other words, once Conservative men acknowledged the benefits of the canvassing and campaigning work carried out by the women members of the Primrose League it became difficult for them to justify their refusal to give them the vote.

In her comparative study of the political activities of Conservative and Liberal women Linda Walker contrasts the radical and campaigning approach of Liberal women to the quieter backroom work of their Conservative counterparts. She maintains that whereas members of the Women's Liberal Federation openly called for female enfranchisement, and campaigned on all kinds of social and economic questions that affected the welfare of women and children, the Conservative women of the Primrose League were primarily canvassers on behalf of men who adopted a non-confrontational stance on questions such as women's suffrage.[17] This view of Conservative women as compliant and timid in contrast to the more radical women of the Liberal and Labour parties is the conventional one, and continues to figure in many of the references to their political activities during this period. In a polemical work on the politics of Conservative women, Beatrix Campbell looks at their work in the Primrose League, and, despite some admiration for their sheer numbers and organising abilities, she compares them unfavourably with what she sees as the more 'visionary' women's organisations such as the Women's Co-operative Guild.[18] She accuses the women of the Primrose League of a failure to engage with the kinds of issues that were concerning more radicalised women at the turn of the century – the needs of working women, the problems of poor housing and sanitation, and the concern for maternal and infant mortality – and dismisses the League's work as insignificant in comparison – 'the League's function was to organise women for the Conservative cause; it was not to organise for the cause of women'.[19] While it is true that Conservative women did not involve themselves in campaigning work on social issues as

representatives of the Primrose League, they were certainly active at local level in a variety of philanthropic organisations, and, in smaller numbers, on School Boards, Town Councils and Boards of Guardians.[20]

The belief that Conservative women chose 'to organise women for the Conservative cause' rather than for 'the cause of women' is also held by those feminist historians for whom the women's suffrage movement is necessarily linked to the emergence of radical feminism, particularly during the later stages of the campaign. Garner, for example, attempts to show that the constitutional suffrage movement gradually changed its predominantly conservative campaigning position to one that 'implied that the struggle for emancipation went beyond the vote and was linked to class'.[21] Similarly, Holton sees the movement after 1900 evolving as a partnership between Liberal feminists and socialist women, and hardly mentions Conservative participation at all, even though she rightly emphasises the importance of class in her analysis. She observes that 'most suffragists brought to their campaigning pre-existing class and party loyalties', but does not pursue this theme in relation to the Conservative suffragists.[22] The persistent accusation that conservatism and Conservatism only served to hold back the development of a progressive suffrage movement is partly responsible for the marginalization of Conservative suffragists in some suffrage histories, and supports the view that it is because of this neglect the suffrage narrative is incomplete.[23]

The majority of Conservative women who became prominently involved in the political work of the League were from the aristocratic and gentry classes, and important contributions which deal with the private, social and political activities of aristocratic women from both the Conservative and Liberal parties have been made by Pat Jalland and Kim Reynolds, while Julia Bush has produced a valuable study of the participation of Edwardian aristocratic and upper-class women in the work of imperialism, through their membership of various patriotic leagues and imperialist associations.[24] Bush examines the connections between the female membership of these organisations and the women's suffrage and anti-suffrage movements, and looks at the link between the social background and the political work of prominent Conservative women like Lady Louisa Knightley and Maud, Countess of Selborne, both of whom combined an imperialist commitment with a strong allegiance to the suffrage cause. She makes extensive use of the diaries, letters, and memoirs left behind by a number of Conservative women – for example, the journals of Lady Knightley, the papers of the Countess of Selborne, and the autobiographies of Margaret, Countess of Jersey and Lady St. Helier – all of whom provide lively and opinionated

accounts of their political activities.[25] This account of Conservative suffragism uses these sources, together with other papers left behind by suffrage campaigners such as Beatrice Cartwright, Emily Davies and Lady Jane Strachey.[26] Letters and records of speeches can be invaluable to the researcher, but it is important to remember that diaries were often written with the knowledge that they might be published at a later date, and autobiographies were usually carefully self-censored for the intended audience of friends, relatives and elite society, and therefore these kinds of sources should be approached with caution. However, the testimonies of women like these, all of whom were prominent members of Edwardian political society (apart from the middle-class Emily Davies), provide an insight into their motives for becoming involved in the suffrage debate, and reveal how far the question of female enfranchisement was a party political issue for Conservative women as well as part of a more general desire for an improvement in the economic, political and social circumstances of all women.

In addition to these kinds of first-hand accounts there are a number of interesting biographical studies which can help to throw further light on the ideas and strategies of Conservative women who were prominent in the women's movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In a work that examines the life and work of four leading activists, Barbara Caine looks at two Conservative women who were involved in the early campaign for female enfranchisement – Frances Power Cobbe and Emily Davies. Caine investigates the complex relationship between their political beliefs and their commitment to improving the position of their own sex, and in the process provides us with a valuable analytical framework for use in the study of other Conservative women who were involved in the suffrage movement.[27] Philippa Levine has dealt with similar issues in her study of 'feminist lives' in the latter half of the nineteenth century. She examines the religious, political and family links between many of those who campaigned for an improvement in the political and social position of women and in the process extends the knowledge we already have of Conservative suffragists such as Jessie Boucherett, Frances Power Cobbe, Emily Davies, Lady Knightley and Lady Strachey, as well as anti-suffragists like Lady Jersey.[28]

The issue of whether the Conservative suffragists in this study can be called 'feminists' is an important one, as there has always been considerable debate about the use of the term to describe women who were active in the social and political sphere during the period under discussion. Rendall has suggested that the first recorded use of the term 'feminist' in Britain was in

a news report from Paris in the *Daily News* of 12 October 1894. A more sophisticated use of the word has been found in an article written in 1898 for the *Westminster Review* by the radical campaigner Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, who used it to describe a broad set of ideas out of which came the notion that a woman's commitment to improving the position of her own sex was part of her personal as well as political and social identity.[29] Ideas among current historians of women's history about who can be called a feminist range from Banks' view that the term can be applied to anyone who has 'tried to change the position of women, or the ideas about women', to Levine's belief that a recognition of women's shared disabilities 'in a context of political struggle' is required.[30]

In her study of the lives and work of Frances Power Cobbe and Emily Davies Caine has concluded that the assumption by some historians that nineteenth-century feminism was necessarily an offshoot of liberalism denies the fact that there was a 'range and complexity of feminist activities', and a 'diversity of approach and political commitment even amongst the leading figures of the English women's movement', and she is happy to call these two Conservative women 'feminists'.[31] However, while she is sympathetic to some of the ideas expressed by Banks, Caine and Levine, Jane Lewis has adopted a more pragmatic solution to what continues to be a controversial argument, and it is her approach which will be adopted in this particular study of Conservative suffragism. Lewis has recognised that the use of the word 'feminist' to define the legitimacy of an individual's work to improve the position of women in society can cause a number of difficulties, particularly in situations where some women were happy to support some reforms while rejecting others. She has attempted to address some of the problems caused by using easy labels to describe the personal philosophies that lay behind each woman's motivation to undertake public work in the political and social spheres, and begins by suggesting that in the process of undertaking that work many women were undoubtedly negotiating new boundaries within which to operate. It was often a consciousness of 'the woman question', as well as class allegiances and party political considerations, that motivated many women to enter the public sphere, but an overarching concern to push individual women into the category of 'feminist' can be a crude exercise.[32] While the term 'feminist' will not be used to describe the Conservative suffragists who are the subjects of this book, that does not rule out the possibility that the reader might conclude by the end of it that some individuals fit that description.

In contrast to the biographical material on Conservative women which examines the problems caused by the gendered nature of public life and the

need to reconcile party loyalties with suffrage politics, biographies of leaders of the Conservative Party have concentrated almost exclusively on their activities in the realm of 'high' politics.[33] However, there are examples which have included more detailed descriptions of their attitudes towards the women in their own family and their personal approach to legislation where it affected the position of women, including female suffrage. A recent biography of the Conservative Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, paints a vivid picture of family life at Hatfield which indicates that the Cecil women had an equal voice in family discussions and decision-making, but the author also points out that Salisbury was in the contradictory position of being 'a supporter of giving women the franchise but not a university education'.[34] Similarly, Max Egremont, one of the biographers of Salisbury's nephew and successor Arthur Balfour, has shown how he was surrounded by strong women who undoubtedly influenced his position on the suffrage question – his sisters and his sisters-in-law were all active suffragists.[35] Since, in contrast to many of their own backbenchers, these two Conservative leaders were supportive of the principle of female enfranchisement, some awareness of how much their private relationships with women may have affected their political judgment can add to our understanding of the motivation of male suffragists.[36] The papers and letters of Balfour, and also of three other supporters of the enfranchisement of women – Lord Robert Cecil, Victor, 2nd Earl of Lytton and the 2nd Earl of Selborne – provide a unique insight into the day-by-day interaction that these men had with the leaders of the suffrage movement and those members of their own families who were active suffragists. At the same time the journals kept by influential Conservative politicians such as Bridgeman and Sanders enable us to understand the pressing political issues with which the women's suffrage question had to compete; however, references to the suffrage debate are few among the Conservative diarists.[37]

Most of the standard histories of the Conservative Party show little interest in Conservative women's participation in organisations like the Primrose League or in the campaign for female enfranchisement.[38] Although Joni Lovenduski, Pippa Norris and Catriona Burness contribute a chapter on women's role in the party as part of Seldon and Ball's overview of the phenomenon of Conservatism during the twentieth century, most Conservative historians have continued to reinforce the assumption that the 'high' politics of parliamentary government are, as Elaine Chalus puts it, 'the only "real" politics'.[39] It has been left to historians like Jon Lawrence and David Jarvis to examine the effects of the politics of gender on the Conservative Party during the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries.[40] Lawrence has looked at the social dimension of late Victorian and Edwardian Conservatism and argues that the gendered language of politics during this period gradually responded to the increasing entry of women into the political sphere by initiating a more 'domestic-centred political discourse'.[41] In his exploration of Conservative assumptions about gender roles within the party, Jarvis points out that an enduring Conservative belief in the virtue of a masculine political culture meant that women's growing involvement in party organisation was seen as helpful but essentially marginal to the activities of male party members. Any idea of further encroachment by women into traditionally male preserves was strongly resisted by most Conservative men, particularly at the grassroots level of the constituency association or club.

The conclusion must be reached, therefore, that the bulk of the relevant literature reveals a notable lack of critical material on the interaction of the Conservative Party and Conservative women with the women's suffrage movement. The 'black hole' in 'official' histories of the Conservative Party and its leaders, which, until recently, showed little interest in the activities of Conservative women, and the suffrage histories where, similarly, Conservative women are generally conspicuous by their absence, is a large one. The implication is that the contribution of Conservative women was of little real significance either to the Conservative Party or to the suffrage movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, yet there is clear evidence that during this period many of them were active members of party-based organisations and single issue groups, as well as being involved in local government, the women's suffrage societies and their own Conservative suffrage organisation. The expansion of their political role through their participation in these activities was achieved by attempting to work with men rather than against them, and it was by this method that a relatively small but determined group of Conservative suffragists gradually gained support in the party. Inevitably existing class and party loyalties influenced their political agenda, particularly in relation to the expansion of representative government and the future role of women in the political affairs of the nation, and this could, on occasions, bring them into conflict with the more radical suffrage groups. However, this should not detract from the recognition of the distinctive contribution of Conservative women to the campaign for women's suffrage, and an acknowledgement of the support they received from some Conservative men in parliament and in the party at large.

Finally, there are some necessary observations to be made about the organisation of this book. Although the women's suffrage organisations were

national in scope and prominent Conservative supporters of the movement could be found in most parts of Britain, this book will concentrate on the areas where Conservative suffragism was most active – in London, and the English provinces. There was considerable organised Conservative support for the enfranchisement of women in Edinburgh and Glasgow led by Lady Betty Balfour, but most of the Scottish aristocracy made their base in London, particularly when Parliament was in session. In Ireland Conservative suffragists were based in Dublin, under the leadership of the Countess of Fingall, while Welsh suffragism was dominated by Liberal women, although, as Ursula Masson has pointed out, there were some active Conservative women in South Wales.[42] However, the most prominent Conservative suffragists were from political families, and it was therefore understandable that most of their work was carried out in London, where there was access to political power and parliamentary influence.

This survey of Conservative suffragism is broadly chronological in nature – chapter one looks at the response of the late nineteenth-century Conservative Party to the political challenges posed by a greatly enlarged electorate, incipient class conflict and Irish nationalism, thus providing the context for the increasing involvement of Conservative women in political activities outside Westminster. It also examines the background to the position of Conservative women in relation to the 'woman question', which so preoccupied political and social commentators of the period. Chapter two begins by looking at the political work of Conservative women in the Primrose League, founded in the 1880s, and the opportunities for raising the suffrage question within that organisation, while chapter three deals with the early parliamentary suffrage debates from the 1870s until 1904 and the reaction of Conservative MPs to the suffrage question. Chapter four takes the discussion into the twentieth century, dealing with the events that led to the founding of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA) in 1908 and examining the first year of its existence; chapter five attempts to analyse in detail the issues that were raised in the journal of the CUWFA during its years of publication from 1909 to 1918. The remaining chapters follow the course of the campaign for women's suffrage from the point of view of the women of the CUWFA and their male allies in Parliament between the years 1910 and 1914.

1

SETTING THE SCENE

The Conservative Party and the 'political nation'

This study of Conservative involvement in the campaign for women's suffrage takes 1880 as representing the beginning of a period when there were serious challenges to what Harris has called 'the character and identity of the political nation'.[1] Although the 1867 Reform Act had enfranchised the urban householder and increased the existing British electorate of 1.3 million by just over a million voters, mainly in the boroughs, Gladstone's 1884 Reform Act produced a more radical change in the social base of the electorate. The agricultural labourer and other householders in the counties were given the vote, thus increasing the number of voters by a further 2.5 million, making a total electorate of about 5.6 million.[2] At the same time the 1885 Redistribution Bill reallocated parliamentary seats in favour of the large towns and cities, and established many smaller, more homogenous single-member constituencies, particularly in the suburbs, the effect of which was to help bring about a gradual change from the representation of wider community interests to a more narrow representation of class.[3] Legislation to introduce a secret ballot in 1872 and to abolish corrupt practices by limiting candidates' expenses in 1883 did much to change attitudes to political campaigning, and it was acknowledged that there was a need for more sophisticated ways to muster party support and educate the new mass of voters.

Faced with a substantially enlarged electorate the Conservative Party adapted to the new situation extraordinarily well. The establishment of the Primrose League in 1883, which attracted over a million members of both sexes and all classes by 1891, meant that the party could call on an unofficial 'army of unpaid canvassers', who set about scrutinising electoral registers in order to identify Conservative voters and make sure that they turned out to vote.[4] The League was the place where many Conservative

women became involved in political activity for the first time, and their organising abilities and social networking became indispensible to the party at election time. The League's pledge to defend Empire, Church, Monarchy and the Estates of the Realm, taken together with a commitment to protect the propertied interest, defined the chief concerns of the Conservative Party during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and represented the basis of their political platform.[5] Although the Conservatives were in office from 1886 to 1906 (apart from the Liberal government of 1892 to 1895), they did not give the appearance of being a confident party – the main considerations that underpinned their domestic and imperial policies were the fear of socialism and the preservation of existing institutions.

One reason for this defensive approach was their belief that the changes in the size and nature of the electorate were a potentially destructive development. Adhering to the Conservative instinct that change should be undertaken only in order to preserve, their argument against an expanded electorate was essentially a utilitarian one – that the propertied and educated classes were natural leaders 'whose attributes of disinterestedness and responsibility, together with their attachment to the maintenance of stability, were the best obtainable guarantees of good government', and further parliamentary reform was likely to upset the balance of power between the classes which was essential to a strong constitution.[6] Lord Salisbury, who became Conservative Prime Minister in 1885, had felt so strongly about the issue that he had resigned over the 1867 Reform Bill which had been introduced by his own party. The speech he made then, in which he anticipated a conflict between the classes, summed up the views which he still held in 1884:

> If… you come to a question between class and class where the interests of one class are pitted against those of another, you will find that all those securities of rank, wealth and influence, in which you trust, are mere feathers in the balance against the solid interest and the real genuine passion of mankind…[7]

Concern about the dangers of class conflict fuelled a revival of interest in interventionist solutions to economic and social problems.[8] The American writer Henry George's influential book, *Progress and Poverty*, which was published in Britain in 1880, attracted considerable debate with its argument that the private ownership of land was responsible for unacceptable inequalities within society, while in his *Radical Programme*

of 1885 the Liberal Joseph Chamberlain advocated the compulsory purchase of land to provide allotments for working people.[9] For some Conservatives these kinds of theoretical arguments lay behind Gladstone's Irish Land Act of 1881, which established a system of 'fair' rents, as well as giving tenants protection from arbitrary eviction and the right to sell their occupancy at the best market price – a move that was seen as a threat to the propertied interest.[10]

The influence of George's book may have been one reason why the 1880s and 1890s were to see a burgeoning of organisations dedicated to radical political change. The Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Fabian Society were founded in 1884, and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1893. Structural changes in the organisation of industry and work led to an intensification of class conflict, and a previously craft-based trade union movement saw increasing numbers of unskilled workers organise strikes and demonstrations throughout the 1880s and 1890s. This 'new' unionism was to mark the beginning of what the labour leader Ben Tillett described as 'that close alliance in thought and purpose between the Trade Union Movement and the Socialist Movement which produced in due time the Labour Party'.[11] Although trade union membership was still relatively low (1.5 million men by 1895), and most working-class voters continued to support the Liberal Party, the growth of interest in socialist ideas appeared to support the perception that class divisions were hardening during the late nineteenth century, and this added to the unease already felt by many in the Conservative Party.[12]

The last quarter of the nineteenth-century had seen an increase in legislation dealing with education, labour, public health and housing, some of which had been enacted under a Conservative government, but there continued to be pressure for further social reform as philanthropists and social investigators like Samuel Barnett and Charles Booth began to catalogue the serious social problems caused by economic depression and increasing urbanization (by 1890 about 70% of Britain's population lived in towns and cities).[13] Both Barnett and Booth advocated a policy of 'limited socialism' to ameliorate the worst effects of poverty, but the majority of Conservatives believed that any increase in state intervention on behalf of the poor implied a move towards a socialist society which was to be strongly resisted. As Green has pointed out, the party of landownership became the party of property and anti-socialism, as many middle-class voters deserted the Liberal Party in response to impending danger.[14] Lord Salisbury was careful to include the threat to the propertied middle classes as well as the landed élite in his warning:

> Those who lead the poorer classes of this country are industriously pressing upon them… that the function of legislation is to transfer to them something – an indefinite and unlimited something – from the pockets of their more fortunate countrymen… On the other hand, by a necessary consequence, the members of the classes who are in any sense or degree holders of property are becoming uneasy at the prospect which lies before them. The uneasiness is greatest among those whose property consists in land, because they have been most attacked; but the feeling is not confined to them… manufacturers, house-owners, railway shareholders, fundholders, are painfully aware that they have all been threatened… [15]

These warnings about the threat of socialism would preoccupy the Conservative Party for some time to come, and they gave rise to a public debate about the issue in the Victorian periodical press during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. William Cunningham, the Conservative economic historian, identified '122 articles on the subject of socialism in the *National Review*, the *Contemporary Review*, the *Fortnightly Review*, and the *Quarterly Review* between 1883 and 1903', and at least half were of Conservative authorship.[16] More practical opposition to socialism came with the founding in 1882 of the Liberty and Property Defence League by the Conservative Lord Elcho, and later, the Anti-Socialist Union (1908) – both organisations that were part of the proliferation of leagues joined by Conservative men and women to support specific areas of party policy between 1880 and 1914.[17]

As well as the increase in concern about the growth of interest in collectivist solutions to social problems, there was another issue which dominated late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century Conservative politics – the Irish question. Gladstone's Irish Land Acts of 1870 and 1881 were both Liberal attempts to stave off the growth of Irish nationalism and solve the problem of rural violence, but the need to come to an agreement over the future of Ireland became apparent when the 1884 Reform Act increased the Irish electorate fourfold and the following year 85 Irish Nationalist MPs were elected to the House of Commons. The Home Rule Bill introduced by Gladstone in 1886 was seen by the Liberal Prime Minister as the solution to the Irish problem, but it was defeated, with 93 Liberals led by Lord Hartington and Joseph Chamberlain voting with the Conservative Party against the measure.[18] The result was a split in the Liberal Party that would never be repaired. By 1895 many of the Liberal Unionists who had defected joined with the Conservative Party to form a

Unionist coalition.[19] Some years later, in her memoirs, the Conservative Lady St Helier remembered the depth of feeling experienced by those who had opposed the Home Rule Bill and the divisions it caused within the political establishment and in the country at large:

> Nothing divided society like the Home Rule question… The integrity and the greatness of the Empire was bound up in the Union, and the unanimous feeling of the country was that a separate Government for Ireland meant a position which, however fettered it might be by legislation, must, in the long run, lead to independence. An unfriendly Ireland, bitterly opposed to British policy… made the idea of Home Rule inconceivable to the British people…[20]

Many Conservatives and Liberal Unionists saw Irish nationalism not only as an attack on the political and territorial integrity of of the United Kingdom, but also as a threat to the unity of the entire British Empire. The defence of the Empire had become inextricably linked with the Conservative Party since Disraeli's Crystal Palace speech in 1872, when, after emphasising the need 'to maintain the institutions of the country' and to 'elevate the condition of the people', he asserted that 'another… great object of the Tory party… is, in my opinion, to uphold the Empire of England'. At the same time he suggested the the establishment of 'an Imperial tariff' – , thus anticipating the party's adoption of a controversial tariff reform policy more than thirty years later.[21] In the years following Disraeli's speech the Conservative Party claimed the role of the party of Empire, and, with the help of the Primrose League, used the appeal of popular patriotism to gain cross-class support. By the 1880s, at a time when Egypt, India and parts of South Africa were experiencing the effects of nationalist agitation, and trade rivals like Germany and France were competing with Britain in the 'scramble for Africa', the argument for securing a strong, united British Empire became one of the platforms on which the Unionist Party built its electoral success.[22]

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century the growth of the electorate, the institution of the secret ballot, the establishment of more class-based constituencies, and a substantial increase in the responsibilities of local government were just some of the factors which led to a need for more efficient party organisation, with the result that thousands of men and women became involved in political activity for the first time. An older, mid-Victorian model of government run by a small group of men predominantly from the landed aristocracy was gradually disappearing, to

be replaced by a confrontational style of party politics which was more responsive to the electorate. Although late nineteenth-century government was still largely conducted by a landowning élite, they were facing a gradual decline in influence and a collapse in land values, while MPs drawn from the ranks of the urban industrial, business and professional classes were beginning to grow in numbers and wealth.[23] The statistics that have been compiled to show the socio-occupational backgrounds of MPs can be confusing, but they all demonstrate the same tendency.[24] As Cannadine has observed, 'as the last quarter of the nineteenth century opened, the House of Commons and the House of Lords were both dominated by the landowning classes… by the First World War, this was no longer the case'.[25]

The men and women of the Primrose League took up the core issues of the protection of property and the defence of Church, Constitution and Empire, and by means of a mixture of political education and social events persuaded large numbers of the working-class electorate to keep the Conservative Party and its Unionist allies in office, at least until 1906. However, by 1902, when Lord Salisbury retired, the 'character and identity of the political nation' had so altered that the Conservative Party was faced with the problem of having to, as Green has put it, 'reconstruct its identity and redefine its constituency'.[26] Confrontation between the parties over Liberal policies on constitutional, imperial, social and economic questions, as well as internal divisions within the Unionist Party over the adoption of a protectionist trade policy, was to lead to what one historian has called 'domestic anarchy' and another has argued was more a 'crisis of adaptation' during the years from the beginning of the century to the outbreak of World War I in 1914.[27] The campaign for women's suffrage should be seen in the context of the priorities of the Conservative Party after 1884 – the idea of supporting a further extension to the electorate was probably one of the least important issues on the agenda for a party which, as it entered the twentieth century, had become engaged in a debate about 'the nature of Conservatism itself'.[28]

The position of women in Britain between 1850 and 1880

Just as the survey of the political preoccupations of the Conservative Party in the late nineteenth century focussed on the 1880s as a period when existing political institutions were being challenged by the forces of radicalism, that same decade was a time when, as a result of the increasing economic and social freedom being experienced by middle-class women, there was a renewed debate on the 'woman question' which continued into the early years of the next century. This debate, in which both men and

women participated, had been in evidence in the books and periodicals of middle-class Britain since the 1830s, and centred on fundamental questions concerning woman's nature and role in society.[29] Although the 'woman question' was not new – Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau's views about the essential nature of women had culminated in the publication of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* only forty years before – there were fresh issues for debate arising out of the political, economic and social changes taking place in nineteenth-century Britain, and a variety of competing theories about the place of women in society emerged which provide useful models with which the reality of women's lives can be compared.[30]

Much of the argument about the social construction of gender during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has centred round the ideology of 'separate spheres', which is seen as synonymous with the idea of the 'public' and 'private'. The positioning of women in the private domestic sphere, and men in the public space has been viewed by some historians as a characteristic of the emerging affluent and more leisured middle-class, influenced by post-Enlightenment individualism and evangelical zeal, determined to exert its moral and political influence on Victorian society.[31] Amanda Vickery has examined this model and makes the argument that far from being located in a particular moment in history, the public/private dichotomy served 'as a loose description of a very long-standing difference between the lives of women and men'.[32] The ideology of 'separate spheres' is now considered to be too rigid a way of looking at what was always a 'borderland' area of shifting boundaries which were the subject of constant negotiation between men and women.[33] While it is clear that women continued to be denied access to the institutions where political and economic power lay, Vickery suggests that during the nineteenth century the change to a more restrictive public morality and the idealisation of women's moral role within the family probably resulted in an *increase* in women's public work, through the expansion of organised philanthropy and their involvement in moral reform campaigns, rather than a retreat into the seclusion of the home. These activities were acceptable to the society at large because they were seen as an extension of familial concerns – an argument which was consistently used by women to justify their presence in, and to negotiate a wider access to, the public space.

The participation of middle-class women in the work of social and moral reform was usually inspired by their religious belief – the evangelical call to save souls and regenerate society sent them out of their homes and into the orphanages, workhouses, asylums and houses of the poor.[34] Women found that they were well suited to the task because they were able to cross the

boundaries of class and appeal to the poor in the language of maternal concern. Their philanthropic work offered women confirmation of the value of their domestic and moral role, and provided them with the opportunity to increase their participation in the wider society without presenting a challenge to existing conventions. It gave them the opportunity to develop what Frances Power Cobbe argued were 'their moral powers, and all their intellectual faculties' as well as their organising abilities.[35] The second half of the nineteenth century saw a rapid increase in the number of women's philanthropic organisations, ranging from societies dedicated to workhouse visiting and befriending young working girls to associations set up to promote sanitary reform and female emigration.[36] The organisation of philanthropy as a profession was to create employment for thousands of women – a survey of women's work carried out by Louisa Hubbard in 1893 estimated that about 500,000 women laboured 'continuously and semi-professionally' in philanthropy, while another 20,000 supported themselves as 'paid officials' in charitable societies.[37]

Women's drive to extend the scope of their philanthropic work was to attract some of them into the more public realm of local government.[38] In 1869 an amendment to the Municipal Franchise Act gave women ratepayers in England and Wales the local vote on the same terms as men, although it was deemed that married women were represented by their husbands under the law of 'coverture' and were not entitled to vote.[39] In 1870 women ratepayers were able to vote for and sit on the new School Boards, and by 1875 the first woman was elected to a Poor Law Board, but almost twenty years were to pass before qualified women were able to stand for election to Parish and District Councils under the Local Government Act of 1894.[40] Although there was considerable male resistance to women entering local government, there was a gradual recognition that there was a role for them to play as successive governments extended the power of local authorities to regulate conditions in workhouses, asylums, schools and working-class homes – the very areas where women's knowledge of domestic management was required.[41] The role played by women in local government tended to confirm existing ideas about their nature and capabilities, but they were able to capitalise on the virtues of the 'womanly' influence in civic life, while at the same time demonstrating their proficiency in the more 'masculine' activities of standing for election, public speaking and committee work.[42]

The various issues that made up the 'woman question' debate formed the background to the establishment of the Langham Place Circle in the late 1850s – a development which marked the beginning of the organised

women's movement. Led by two women from middle-class, radical Unitarian families, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes, and with two Conservative women, Jessie Boucherett and Emily Davies, playing a prominent role, the group founded the *English Woman's Journal* in 1857, and initiated campaigns to increase women's financial independence through the reform of the married women's property laws, extend their opportunities for employment, and improve their access to secondary and higher education.[43] The members of the Langham Place Circle wanted to move away from the idea of philanthropy as the only respectable way in which women could achieve status in the wider community – they believed that it was more important to change the legal, educational and social conventions which they considered were holding back their progress. With that in mind they set in motion the campaign for women's property rights which culminated in the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, which combined to allow women to retain their earnings and personal property. These measures, together with the Custody of Infants Act and the Maintenance of Wives (Desertion) Act of 1886, gave substantial numbers of married women, mostly middle class, a measure of control over their lives which they had not experienced before.[44] As well as campaigning to improve the position of the married woman the Langham Place Circle also sought to address the problem of the single, unemployed middle-class woman.[45] The Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, founded by Jessie Boucherett in 1859, offered classes in clerical and commercial subjects like bookkeeping and legal copying, and organised an employment bureau where women could register their availability for work.

One of the chief concerns of the nineteenth-century women's movement centred on the question of female education. In 1865 Dorothea Beale, the principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College, gave a paper to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science: 'The education of girls has too often been made showy, rather than real and useful – accomplishments have been made the main thing… while those branches of study especially calculated to form the judgment, to cultivate the understanding, and to discipline the character… have been neglected'.[46] Beale's words were addressed primarily to 'daughters of the higher classes', and reflected her conviction that one of the chief obstacles to women's advancement was the poor standard of education that most girls received compared to boys.[47] As a result of the concerns of women like Beale and Emily Davies of the Langham Place Circle, and the damning report of the 1864 Taunton Schools Inquiry Commission, the second half of the nineteenth century saw a rapid expansion in the

provision of independent schools for girls.[48] Although the quality of education for middle-class girls began to improve, the majority of the daughters of the upper classes continued to be taught at home where they received an education which concentrated on the acquisition of 'accomplishments', while at the other end of the class spectrum most working-class girls attended the new elementary Board Schools which were set up as a result of the 1870 Education Act, where they were taught a curriculum which was heavily weighted towards the teaching of domestic skills.

How girls were to be educated and for what purpose was one of the main areas of contention in the 'woman question' debate. The argument, which was to last well into the twentieth century, continued to centre around the issue of whether female education should be designed to enable women to become independent or directed at training them for their roles as wives and mothers. Opposition to reform usually focussed on the fear that an academic education might cause women to reject marriage and motherhood and bring them into competition with men, but there was also the claim from some doctors that it would damage women's reproductive abilities.[49] The schools themselves were anxious to reassure parents that their daughters would not become 'mannish' as a result of their studies – the first annual report of Cheltenham Ladies' College explained that each girl would receive an education which would 'fit her for the discharge of those responsible duties which devolve upon her as a wife, mother… and friend, the natural companion and helpmeet for man'.[50]

This essentially conservative argument which concentrated on the benefits that the educated woman would bring to the home reflected 'the need to negotiate for public space and recognition', and this gradualist approach was to enable a small but significant number of well-educated young women to attend the women's colleges of higher education that were opening during the 1870s.[51] In colleges like Girton and Newnham at Cambridge, the former founded by Emily Davies and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, and Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford, the argument about women's fitness to receive an identical academic education to men was rehearsed again, but as female students routinely began to pass the same examinations as their male counterparts the idea that they were men's intellectual inferiors began to lose credibility.[52] The extent of male uneasiness at women's progress in higher education during the latter half of the nineteenth century indicated the social importance of the change, and these misgivings were to be exhibited on a much greater scale during the campaign for female enfranchisement.[53]

The essential conservatism of the campaign for women's education was

largely responsible for the progress it made during this period. The headmistresses of the new girls' schools and the principals of the women's colleges wanted to develop the potential of their students and equip them to make a useful contribution to society, but they did not necessarily believe that women should be publicly campaigning for their political and social rights. Joyce Senders Pedersen has emphasised the quiet work done by women behind the scenes to improve female education – the headmistresses of the independent schools believed in the religious nature of their calling, and sought 'to bring about the well-being of nations by education rather than by revolution…' But Pedersen has also recognised that there was another side to this conservative agenda: 'These reforming teachers might praise the virtue of the submissive, "womanly" woman, but the model they themselves presented to their pupils was that of an independent, self-reliant individual… they… unintentionally enhanced women's opportunities for self-sufficiency and self-assertion'.[54] It is difficult to know if these headmistresses were conscious of the mixed messages they might be conveying to the girls in their charge, but evidence from the writing of Dorothea Beale, for example, has revealed her as woman who saw herself as a servant of God who had taken up 'the ministry of teaching', rather than a proto-feminist.[55]

By the early 1880s women had gained more legal rights within marriage and had made significant strides in gaining more access to areas of public life hitherto closed to them. The possibility of higher education, wider opportunities for employment, entry to the medical profession, participation in local government – the progress was considerable. Women had also become involved in moral reform campaigns – the agitation to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts between 1869 and 1886 challenged the moral 'double standard' where it related to prostitution, and condemned legislation which punished the behaviour of women but condoned the activities of men. The formation of the British Women's Temperance Association in 1876 and the National Vigilance Association in 1886 were further indications of the growing concern shown by women for the moral welfare of the nation.[56] These activities reflected the fact that most women were improving their position through essentially conservative means – while they were expanding their influence in the public space they were arguing that it was not for their own benefit but for the good of Britain and her empire. The strong reliance on the argument that women's distinctive qualities of maternal concern and moral influence would benefit the nation came to outweigh the demand which was based on an idea of 'rights', in the tradition of radical women like Mary Wollstonecraft.

The beginning of the organised campaign for women's suffrage

Jane Rendall has suggested that the emergence of the organised campaign for female enfranchisement in the mid 1860s 'can be understood as part of the internal development of a "woman-centred" movement', which had grown out of the work of women of the Langham Place Circle and their supporters.[57] She also places it in the context of a middle-class radical liberalism which looked to the philosopher and suffragist John Stuart Mill for intellectual support for women's suffrage. In his influential work *The Subjection of Women*, which was published in 1869 but contained ideas which he had raised some years before, Mill argued that women's subordinate status hindered their development as independent beings.[58] He believed that what was commonly termed 'women's nature' was socially constructed rather than innate, and the result was an excessive self-abnegation on the part of women, particularly in marriage, where they were legally, and sometimes practically, nothing better than slaves to their husbands. Mill suggested that the enfranchisement of women was one way to ensure that their interests were properly represented, and his argument, although it retained some aspects of Victorian domestic ideology, encapsulated many of the concerns of those who sought an improvement in women's political, legal and social position. Although his thesis was based on fundamental liberal principles which emphasised individual self-improvement, women from more conservative political backgrounds acknowledged the influence of Mill's work, their support made easier by the fact that he was in favour of a limited franchise which depended on proof of education and the payment of taxes.[59]

The organised campaign for women's suffrage began in 1866 with a petition asking for the enfranchisement of propertied women and containing almost 1,500 signatures collected by members of the Kensington Society and the Langham Place Circle.[60] The petition was presented to Mill, who had become a Liberal MP in 1865, and in 1867, when a Conservative Reform Bill came before the House of Commons, he introduced an amendment which asked that 'person' should be substituted for 'man' in the clause of the Bill which dealt with the occupational qualification for voters in the counties.[61] His amendment failed, but it led to a succession of private members' bills for women's suffrage being presented to Parliament during the 1870s, the first one being introduced by the radical Liberal Jacob Bright in 1870.[62] Between 1866 and 1868 suffrage societies were established in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol and Edinburgh, and a loose federation called the National Society for Women's Suffrage (NSWS) was formed.[63]

It had been the 1832 Reform Act which had formally defined the voter as male for the first time, and in the debate on the 1867 Bill supporters of reform argued that the respectable, intelligent male artisan who was the head of a household was deserving of a vote, thus reinforcing the gendered nature of the franchise.[64] Rendall has taken up this theme and suggested that during the nineteenth-century the issue of parliamentary reform was the subject of continual debate as competing groups attempted to assert their right to be part of the 'political nation' by defining who was and who was not entitled to be part of it.[65] Although the 1867 Conservative Reform Bill almost doubled the electorate, the view persisted that the parliamentary franchise was a privilege rather than a right, and that it should be confined to the educated and respectable classes who supported society by the payment of rates and taxes. The majority of women who called for female enfranchisement accepted this argument, and consequently the late nineteenth-century suffrage campaign was to be a conservative and cautious one, which limited its claim to the enfranchisement of propertied women, and even went so far as to exclude married women from its demands, despite considerable internal dissent on the issue that was to continue for some years to come.[66]

Using a similar strategy to the one which they had adopted in their other campaigns, women moved from the radical 'equal rights' argument for enfranchisement to one that stressed the importance of duties and responsibilities to others, and concentrated on the special moral qualities that women could bring to national life. Rendall has pointed out that 'the arguments for the citizenship of women… differed significantly from the demands of working men. They drew upon the familiarity of middle-class women with a rhetoric of "woman's mission", a rhetoric that had its origins in a language of sexual difference, and in the extensive growth of middle-class women's philanthropic activity…' The educated and responsible woman could argue for a public role inspired by 'a sense of mission to the uneducated and poor, excluded by that very definition, from the political nation… Such a role rested, to varying degrees, on both class and sexual difference'.[67] The same argument would be used to claim imperial citizenship for women based on racial difference – women's role could be extended to include a 'civilising mission' to the non-European women of the Empire.[68]

When, in 1869, Jacob Bright successfully introduced an amendment to the Municipal Franchise Bill which permitted women ratepayers to vote, it signified that 'the boundaries of gender had been formally breached' in the sphere of organised politics.[69] The early 1870s saw women become eligible

to stand for election to School Boards and the first woman Poor Law Guardian was elected. On 4 May 1870 Jacob Bright's Women's Disabilities Removal Bill passed its second reading by 33 votes – it had been supported by 126 MPs including 31 Conservatives – but a week later the measure was defeated at the committee stage.[70] There had been, within the space of six years, a considerable increase in opportunities for women to participate in political life, and this gave rise to the expectation that it would not be long before they were fully enfranchised. However, women's involvement in local government did not dramatically alter the gendered nature of parliamentary politics – as Amanda Vickery has observed: '… the increase in support for women's citizenship over the nineteenth century was neither steady nor linear; the encouragement of the 1860s was very much of its moment'.[71]

The social and political role of Conservative women in the second half of the nineteenth century

The majority of the subjects of this study were women who belonged to what Cannadine has called 'the titled and territorial classes' – a governing élite which ranged from the landed gentry up to the small group of aristocrats whom he identifies as 'territorial magnates'. In his study of the 'decline and fall' of the landed establishment which takes the 1880s as its starting point, Cannadine has argued that while it is difficult to know whether this group possessed a collective class consciousness in the Marxian sense, they did have a shared awareness of their distinctive position as members of landed society, even though they may have held different political views: 'The forces making for unity of perception and of interest were very much stronger than the forces making for diversity, and they were also much more powerful than those moulding and unifying any other class'.[72] As M. L. Bush has observed, 'landownership, a ruling function, shared ideals and a sense of being socially distinguished from the commonality, made [them] aware that they belonged to the same social order.[73]

Membership of the upper classes denoted wealth, status and power – things which Cannadine has suggested were 'preponderantly masculine assets and attributes'.[74] However, Reynolds has pointed out that aristocratic women were never merely producers of heirs and transmitters of property, although that role continued to be important for many aristocratic families throughout the nineteenth century. They were members of a governing class, whether at national or at local level, and this meant that as well as having privileges they also had duties and responsibilities. While the expansion of organised philanthropy increased the opportunities for middle-class women to work outside their homes in the public sphere, the

upper-class and aristocratic women who are the main subjects of this study had always played a public role as part of their position within society and as promoters of their family interests.[75] Much of the public work of aristocratic and gentry women took the form of carrying out their obligations to tenants and employees, to their husbands and families as hostesses, and to their locality as patrons and sponsors.

The philanthropic activities of women from the upper classes were different in nature to those of the middle-class women at this stage. While the latter extended the range of their philanthropic activities by joining organisations like the Workhouse Visiting Society or the Ladies' Sanitary Association, women from the aristocracy and landed gentry usually confined their charitable activities to their estates and the surrounding villages.[76] Philanthropy was seen as one of the moral duties of the privileged, and this took women outside the home to visit sick and needy tenants and set up schools, clubs and libraries in their local neighbourhoods. The Conservative women in this study were no different to other aristocratic women in their feeling of responsibility for the welfare of those who lived and worked on their estates. Lady Knightley, the wife of Sir Rainald Knightley, a Northamptonshire landowner and Conservative MP, was constantly initiating schemes to assist the local inhabitants in the vicinity of her estate, and her activities were described in glowing terms:

> Schemes for the improvement of housing and domestic economy, for the spread of education, thrift, and temperance, for village clubs and Reading Unions, model dwellings and penny banks, alike claimed her support… An ardent churchwoman… she was always ready to help the bishops and clergy in building schools and churches… No one was a greater lady in Northamptonshire or was more careful of the welfare of her tenants and labourers…[77]

In her study of the philanthropic activities of these women from the landed élite, Gerard has suggested that while they were fulfilling their moral obligation to look after the poor they were reinforcing traditional social relationships of authority and deference through their personal contact with the tenants and employees on their estates.[78] It is true that at a time of considerable social upheaval the landed classes were anxious to maintain social stability, and it is likely that the charitable work of aristocratic women did contribute to easing class divisions. This paternalistic approach would continue to be adopted in their political work for the Primrose League, but how successful this was in fostering deference will be discussed in a later chapter.

Political and social life had always been closely connected in the lives of the upper classes – from an early age women were often expected to be actively involved in the parliamentary campaigns of their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, and the diaries and memoirs of Conservative women like Lady Randolph Churchill, Lady Knightley and Lady Dorothy Nevill are full of descriptions of their electoral campaigning and political activities.[79] As well as electioneering there was the business of entertaining – the houses of the landed élite were a congenial setting for politicians to meet informally to discuss the issues of the day, and a handful of aristocratic women from both political parties became celebrated political hostesses. Lady Salisbury, Theresa, Lady Londonderry, Lady Dorothy Nevill and the Duchess of Buccleuch were among the Conservative women who regularly held political receptions in their London houses during the 'season'. At these social gatherings they used their political skills and personal influence to act as intermediaries to settle political differences, secure the advancement of male relatives, promote the interests of young aspiring politicians, and lobby for political causes. Pugh has emphasised the fact that Conservative leaders greatly valued the conciliatory role that these hostesses played on these occasions: 'Regular receptions… provided a substitute for the formal apparatus for communication… the ladies consolidated the efforts of the whips in reconciling factions, deterring the disenchanted from rebellion and keeping the ambitious in hope'.[80] The extent of the informal political influence of aristocratic women before the 1880s has been extensively researched by Reynolds, who has recognised that they 'did not perceive the political system as a closed world from which they were excluded…' They were able to have a voice in the political affairs of the nation 'in part through their engagement with the political careers of the men in their families, and in part because of the nature of the aristocratic culture which blended politics and society inextricably'.[81]

After 1880 the traditional role of the political hostess began to diminish as the the 1884 Reform Act added substantial numbers of new voters to the electorate. As a consequence of these changes the political parties were forced to become more professionally organised at national and constituency level, and this meant that women's informal influence no longer played a significant role in political society. These social and political developments might have marginalised the political contribution of aristocratic and gentry women but the founding of the Primrose League and the Women's Liberal Associations in the 1880s would provide many of them with greater opportunities to exert political influence at local level. At the same time they became involved in more 'politicised' forms of

philanthropy by joining societies to aid working women and promote female emigration, and a few stood for election to School Boards. The journals of Lady Knightley show that she spent a great deal of her daily life undertaking activities relating to political and social reform, particularly from the 1880s onwards. As well as being a Primrose League Dame she was a member of the Girls' Friendly Society, the British Women's Emigration Association, the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, the Working Ladies' Guild, the National Union of Women Workers, the Freedom of Labour Defence League and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, and, in addition, she became a Parish Councillor in 1894 and a co-opted member of the Northamptonshire County Council Education Committee in 1903.[82] Not all Conservative women developed such extensive interests as Lady Knightley, but this study will show that there is ample evidence to support the view that during the last two decades of the nineteenth century they became a great deal more visible in the 'political nation'.

Conservative suffragists and the early organised women's suffrage movement

Up until the 1880s there were three main strands of support for female enfranchisement among those who had Conservative allegiances. Firstly, women like Jessie Boucherett, Frances Power Cobbe and Emily Davies, the first two with gentry backgrounds and the latter a clergyman's daughter, who all had links with the Langham Place Circle and the Kensington Society and had helped to launch the organised women's suffrage movement in the 1860s; secondly, the aristocratic Conservatives like Lady Knightley and Lady Strachey who had supported the principle of women's suffrage from the 1870s; and thirdly, the small body of Conservative MPs who voted in favour of Mill's amendment and went on to support one or more of the suffrage bills of the early 1870s. Among this group were such stalwart advocates of women's emancipation as John Gorst, a colleague of Emily Davies and one of the first members of Girton College; Russell Gurney, who piloted the 1870 Married Women's Property Bill through the House of Commons; and William Gore Langton, whose wife Anna had signed the 1866 suffrage petition.[83]

It was the first group – the handful of activists with Conservative affiliations – who helped to define the limits of moderate suffragism which would prevail for the next four decades. At this stage the women's party political auxiliaries were not in existence, and the general view has been that women of both parties worked together in philanthropic organisations, and

took a politically independent position on School Boards and as Poor Law Guardians. While this may be true for some areas of women's work it was not so in the nascent women's suffrage campaign, where there were clear divisions between radical Liberal suffragists and the more moderate Liberal and Conservative supporters from the beginning, the latter group holding more 'conservative' views on policy issues.

Boucherett, Cobbe and Davies were all members of the first 'provisional' suffrage committee founded in London on 20 October 1866. In the months before the committee was formed Davies had been reluctant to become involved at all – she had always argued that improving women's education was more important than obtaining the vote, and she did not agree with radical suffragists like Helen Taylor (Mill's stepdaughter) who wanted to include married women in the claim for enfranchisement. Davies did not want to specifically exclude this category of women from their demand, but she believed that the committee should be realistic about how much it could achieve: 'We ask for what there is some remote chance of getting. If we ask for married women also, we get it neither for them nor for the smaller class.'[84] At the first meeting of the new committee the wording of their claim was agreed, and the issue of married women was carefully avoided – it simply asked for 'the abolition of the legal disabilities' which disqualified women from voting in parliamentary elections. However, the conflict between the moderate supporters of women's suffrage and the more radical wing over the question of married women was to prove a intractable problem and was to lead to serious divisions within the movement over succeeding years. A further point of disagreement between the moderates and the radicals was over the question of whether to have women-only or mixed suffrage committees. Davies wanted to work alongside men to achieve her aims because she believed that it was only by having mixed committees that men would become used to the idea of women taking part in public affairs. Cobbe and Davies were both concerned that the views of radical Liberal suffragists like Mill and Taylor would bring the new committee into disrepute, and it was this that led to their decision to 'abandon the vain effort to work with Radicals', and leave the fledgling suffrage committee in 1867.[85] Davies decided to return to her most cherished project, the founding of a women's college at Girton which she finally achieved in 1874, while Cobbe continued her work on behalf of the Married Women's Property Committee; however, both women did rejoin the suffrage campaign some years later.

Emily Davies seemed to be, in many respects, the archetypal Conservative suffragist. Her desire to use personal influence rather than

public agitation to promote the arguments for women's suffrage, her belief that working with men rather than against them was the best way to achieve her goals, her respect for the gradual processes of constitutional change, and her commitment to the need for women to always act within the conventions of society – these were all beliefs which were held by most politically active women with 'conservative instincts'. However, she was also at odds with many of her contemporaries, for although she agreed that there were obvious fundamental differences between the sexes she constantly resisted the language of domesticity so often used by the men and women of all the political parties when referring to women's political role.[86] As far as Davies was concerned there was simply not enough evidence to justify many of the artificial distinctions between the sexes that were so prevalent in society. In Barbara Caine's view Davies 'combined a clear-sighted analysis of the oppression of women with a strong commitment to the existing social and political order, and with a very strong sense of the limits of change which she wished for even in regard to women'.[87]

2

THE PRIMROSE LEAGUE AND THE SUFFRAGE QUESTION

The founding of the Primrose League

The main body of work done on the increasing participation of Conservative women in political activities during the second half of the nineteenth-century has usually focussed on their activities in the Primrose League, the organisation set up in November 1883 by members of the so-called Fourth Party, headed by Lord Randolph Churchill. After the Conservatives were defeated in the 1880 general election, it was clear that party organisation was in disarray, and Churchill and his friends came to realise that if the Conservative Party was to continue to exist as a power in the state 'it must become a popular party'.[1] The 1883 Corrupt Practices Act, which restricted constituency expenditure and therefore limited the employment of paid political canvassers, was another factor in the decision to set up the League. Churchill had originally envisaged a small elite group of young, forward-thinking Conservatives, but it was another member of the Fourth Party, Drummond-Wolff, who moved on to the idea of a League, which would be similar to bodies such as the Freemasons or the Orange Order.

Martin Pugh has identified a number of other factors that may have brought about the appearance of the League.[2] Amongst these were Conservative unease about the implications of the impending extension of the county franchise which would come about in the 1884 Reform Act, a fear of the rise of Irish nationalism with its threat to the Union and to property, and concern caused by the constant and increased rumblings of religious dissent. A letter written by Churchill to *The Times* in April 1883 argued that the Liberal proposals to widen the parliamentary franchise would mean that in future 'questions of the continuation of the Monarchy, the existence of an

hereditary Legislature, the preservation of a central Government for the three Kingdoms, the connexion between Church and State' would be decided by a predominantly working class electorate.[3] It was essential that the Conservative Party gained the hearts and minds of these new voters, and Churchill and his colleagues believed that the answer to these problems was to persuade people from all classes to declare their allegiance to the principles of the new Primrose League by making the following pledge: 'I declare on my honour and faith that I will devote my best ability to the maintenance of Religion, of the Estates of the Realm, and of the Imperial ascendency of the British Empire . . .'[4] This call for loyalty to Monarchy, Religion and Empire was designed to rectify the problem of 'the failure of the Conservative and Constitutional Associations to suit the popular taste or to succeed in joining all classes together for political objects'.[5]

Robb has suggested that the League saw itself as an anti-radical organisation, and an early pamphlet produced by the League seems to confirm this view. It stated that the main purpose of the Primrose League was 'to instruct working men and women how to answer the arguments of the Radicals and the Socialists and the Atheists in the workshops and in the public-houses, and at the street-corners'.[6] Shortly before the formation of the Primrose League Lord Salisbury had warned of the dangers of class antagonism fuelled by radical threats to property and religion, which he maintained were 'devices borrowed from the Socialist armoury'.[7] The growth of German socialism was increasingly seen as a threat to the political stability of the nation, and this view was reflected in the public statements of Conservative politicians and writers. The Conservative author and vehement anti-socialist W. H. Mallock observed that:

> During the last few years events have moved quickly in England… Those theories which, in countries like France and Germany, have already been recognized by statesmen as a source of such serious danger, have at length begun to make appreciable way amongst ourselves…

Mallock attacked radicalism in England as 'nothing more than an unavowed and an undigested Socialism… its favourite method being to set class against class', and he warned that the spread of these ideas had to taken seriously and resisted, both theoretically and at grassroots level.[8] This call to resist the incipient dangers of socialism, with its concomitant threat to property, was taken extremely seriously by Primrose League activists, who firmly believed that threat could be fought off by 'bringing high and low,

rich and poor, together, breaking down social barriers and uniting all classes in a common crusade against the forces of Atheism and Revolution'.[9] It can be argued that the League was set up not only as 'an engine for educating the masses' in the principles of Conservatism, but also as an organisation for the defence of propertied class interests in the face of a new, expanded male electorate with supposedly radical sympathies and a taste for egalitarianism.

Martin Pugh has made the point that the League always claimed that it had 'no exclusive or inexorable relationship with the Conservative Party; whoever upheld the principles of the league might enjoy its support' – the idea being that the organisation might attract those long-standing Liberals who had become disillusioned with Gladstone's radicalism, and were thinking of switching allegiance.[10] This anticipated defection did take place – when Gladstone introduced his Irish Home Rule Bill in 1886 many Liberals, including some extremely prominent ones, left to become Liberal Unionists and allies of the Conservative Party. While Pugh has noted that, despite its claim to neutrality, the League never supported anyone who was not a Conservative or Liberal Unionist, Campbell has put it in stronger terms: '…it was never other than a blindly Tory activist auxiliary'.[11] Much of the Primrose League's success was due to the fact it was separate and self-sufficient – it never made any demands on the Party, in terms of either representation or election promises, it always confined itself to such all-embracing causes as Empire and Monarchy, and it was self-financing.

The structure of the League deliberately looked back to the days of medieval chivalry, which was seen by many as a 'golden age' in terms of the relationship between the classes, and the supremacy of a united church, and the terminology reflected this – the most important members were the 'Knights' and 'Dames', membership fees were called 'tributes', individual branches were labelled 'habitations', and the ruling body was termed the 'Grand Council'. In the aftermath of Gladstone's 1884 Reform Bill, which had added over two million men to the electorate, a new cheap category of Associate membership was established for working class supporters, and within two years Associates constituted 80% of the membership, an achievement which supported the League's claim to 'embrace all classes and creeds', although this aim was always more an attempt to stave off radical influences than to offer the working class the hope of social and economic reform. By disguising the political base of the League with plenty of social activities and entertainments, and by allowing women and children to join in as well, it was possible to attract all classes of people to its ranks. The Primrose League was 'a systematic attempt to make political loyalty an integral part of the lives of a large number of people rather than the private

language of an elite', and it was so successful in its task that by early 1887 it had half a million members, rising to a million by 1891, and although the figures are incomplete, women appeared to constitute, on average, just under half that total.[12]

The role of women in the Primrose League

Women were present in the organisation almost from the beginning, and by December 1883 an addition was made to the rules admitting women as honorary members, which clearly indicated that the move was seen as a concession to begin with: 'Ladies may, on the recommendation of a Ruling Councillor or a Habitation and a payment of the entrance fee and subscription, become honorary Members and shall be entitled Dames of the Primrose League'.[13] The Ladies' Grand Council (LGC) was formed on 2 March 1885, and its first members were aristocratic women, many of whom were already involved in their husband's political activities.[14] Within two years the LGC was reported to have one thousand members, who each paid a guinea to join what was an essentially London-based group, rathet than a wider representative body. Although they were often the butt of jokes about their 'decorative impotence', the members of the LGC were not just 'mere drawing-room ornaments', for they perceived a need for mass propaganda well before their male counterparts.[15] They set about raising a great deal of money for the production of political literature, sent out magic lantern vans to support anti-Home Rule speeches and propaganda, financed lectures, and put on free concerts in poor areas.

However, there was some uncertainty about the limit of the powers and jurisdiction of the LGC which led to the Grand Council having to lay down certain rules of behaviour. Campbell has made a great deal out of the suppression of the initial enthusiasm of the LGC by the men of the Grand Council – they forbade the women to publish anything without their approval, and in the end the women agreed to stop their own production of literature and sit with the men on a Joint Literature Committee. It was also agreed that the LGC was 'subordinate' to the Grand Council, and could not intervene unilaterally in the work of local habitations, and the women themselves decided, after encountering some resistance, not to press for further representation on the Grand Council. Campbell has maintained that 'it could be argued that these women retained a certain power by bowing to the constraints. They succeeded only in so far as they did not challenge and did not invite defeat'.[16] Lovenduski, Norris, and Burness have argued more convincingly that the women 'were obliged to negotiate different degrees of resistance to their participation…(their) absence from

leading positions was a fact of organizational life'.[17] The gendered nature of political life meant that women were not able to penetrate the decision-making bodies of the League, but that did not prevent many of them assuming control of their local habitation. Male members of the Primrose League had other outlets for their political activities – they could join the local Constituency Association or Conservative Working Men's Club, or even stand for Parliament – but the main opportunity for most Conservative women to take part in political life was through the League, so negotiation of the system by working with men rather than against them was seen as the most fruitful way to proceed.[18]

The extension of the electorate and the changes to constituencies as a result of the 1884 Reform Act meant that the first task of women members of the League was to go out and win votes for the Conservative Party. This was achieved by a mixture of organised and determined door-to-door canvassing and voter-registration, alongside light-hearted social events such as garden parties, excursions, and musical evenings, nearly all of which included a short political speech or lantern show. Although the League did assiduously cultivate the increasing numbers of middle-class supporters in the new suburban constituencies, the organisation was particularly strong in rural areas, where communities still remained under the influence of the local gentry and clergy. The long tradition of personal philanthropy undertaken by the women members of influential families was simply extended to include canvassing work for the local habitation. Women were well aware of the power that a long-standing personal relationship with a local shopkeeper or estate worker had when it came to asking for support for the Conservative candidate. Peter Marsh has suggested that the League was able to keep the influence of the landed classes alive long after the changes brought about by electoral reforms had removed their former powers because its 'fetes and Habitation meetings brought the ranks in rural society together, thus nourishing deference'. Marsh linked this continuation of influence with the political activities of the 'wives and daughters of Tory peers, squires and parsons', whose work for the League 'gave new political effect to the social power they had always possessed'.[19]

The question of deference in this context has been discussed by Jon Lawrence. In an analysis of recent work that has been done on the subject of class, he has suggested that too little has been made of the slow but steady decline in deferential behaviour during the nineteenth century, which was caused by the extension of the franchise, the spread of socialism, trade union discontent, and an increasingly secular society. Rather than being deferential, Lawrence has argued, individuals acted out 'a rich variety of

possible class identities and roles' according to their social circumstances, and these were performed to smooth relations between individuals with very different levels of power and social prestige'.[20] Pugh has also recognised the adoption of different kinds of class behaviour in his analysis of the appeal of the Primrose League to its working class members. Respect for the wealthy and powerful did exist, but many working class families joined the League because they wanted to and not because they had to:

> How, otherwise, is one to make sense of the Lancashire workers who both voted Conservative *and* participated in trade unions and strikes? Their behaviour is explicable in so far as both the union and the habitation offered members a combination of tangible advantages and an appeal to their pride and ideals.[21]

Conservatives and the 'woman question'

The sudden expansion of women's political activities during the 1880s brought about a marked increase in public debate on what was termed the 'woman question'. The discussion of questions relating to women's nature and place in society accompanied the increasing penetration of middle-class women into the public sphere, thanks to the expanding opportunities in education, employment and social action which had become open to them. There was almost complete agreement about women's primary function in society – marriage and motherhood would continue to be the ideal state for women to attain – but around this consensus there was considerable debate over the intellectual capabilities of women, the extent to which they should be able to lead independent lives, and the quality and nature of the contribution they might make to public life. It is clear from articles and reports of speeches which appeared in the *Primrose League Gazette* that the 'woman question' had permeated Conservative circles, but now the argument was about the 'New Woman', a phenomenon which was essentially the product of newspapers and novels, and which identified a new 'type' of young, educated, middle (and sometimes upper) class woman, who had made the decision to remain single and pursue a career. In an article entitled 'The New versus The Old Woman', the *Primrose League Gazette* made it clear where most Conservatives stood on the question, and the tendency was to link Conservative principles with the values of womanhood from an earlier age:

> The lady's office is to strive to bring out into the daylight the beauty, the variety, the sentiment and romance which the proposals of our

> enemies threaten to destroy. Who can do this with such effect as a woman? Who can invest so successfully the cause Conservatives have at heart with that spirit of romance which our modern greed and class interests have kept too much in the background.[22]

The increasing involvement of women in Conservative politics at a local and regional level was generally admitted to be of great value to the party, but defining the new role of women so that it fitted into a 'Conservative' view of the place of women in society was the subject of continual discussion well into the next century. It is possible to identify two main strands of thinking in the expressions of support by Conservative men for the activities of the Primrose League women – the belief that women's strength lay in their 'special' qualities of 'tender sympathy' and 'gentle persuasiveness', which, when coupled with 'a loyal devotion to the Constitutional cause' could be highly influential on the working men who now dominated the electorate, and the acknowledgement that their ability to provide efficient and well organised support behind the scenes could help get more Conservative men into the House of Commons.[23] With the expansion of the electorate the work of political education was given an even greater priority, and women proved adept at promoting the beliefs that underlay Conservatism:

> Mothers and daughters in every rank of life have found it possible, without any real evasion of domestic or social duties, to find time amidst their hours of leisure to assist in the regeneration amongst the masses of faith in the first principles of good government – namely, a solid respect for the rights of property, a sacred regard for the religious education of the young, and a deep veneration of the time-honoured institutions of the nation…[24]

This educational work was thought to be perfectly compatible with what the *Primrose League Gazette* called 'women's mission' (with the provision that women did not neglect their primary duties as wife and mother), but at the same time the ruling bodies of the League considered it undesirable for 'women's issues' like the suffrage question to be discussed at habitation meetings, because it might cause antagonism between the sexes and impede the Unionist cause. This was in contrast to the Women's Liberal Associations, where meetings were often dominated by issues which, as Walker has observed, 'were more moral and social in their nature than

political in the ordinary sense of the word'.[25] Many Liberal women, frequently from middle class, non-conformist backgrounds, and often the wives and daughters of radical MPs, had a long association with 'progressive' causes such as the anti-slavery movement, and the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts.[26] They brought a missionary zeal to their political associations – one of the stated objects of the Women's Liberal Federation (WLF) was to encourage 'the promotion of reform'.[27] While Primrose League women preferred instead to speak on national political questions such as Home Rule, religious education, the importance of empire, the defence of the constitution, and the fight against socialism, the issues that preoccupied Liberal women were more likely to be the improvement of women's wages and conditions of employment, reform of the marriage laws, the extension of the eligibility of women to stand for local councils, and moral concerns such as temperance and child welfare.[28] The Liberal women's organisations were sex-segregated and relatively autonomous, which meant they felt free to discuss and campaign on questions that affected all classes of women, with the result that they developed a more self-consciously feminist agenda; however, Conservative women did not see the League as a place that was suitable for the discussion of such concerns. This view was not merely the result of bowing to male pressure – they believed that the League was an organisation for bringing the classes together to support and promote Conservative Party policies, and not a place for raising issues that would deflect the energies of supporters from this aim. As a result most Conservative women kept their involvement in moral and social reform organisations separate from their political work in the League.

It was their feminist agenda that led some progressive Liberal women to question their traditional role in the party (which was much the same as that of the Primrose League women – that of working for the election of men to House of Commons), and call for what they believed to be the more important cause of women's suffrage to be incorporated into official WLF policy. This radical proposal led to deep divisions within the Federation, and in 1892 a group of women broke away to form the Women's National Liberal Association (WNLA), which was made up of those who preferred to remain loyal to the party leadership and traditional Liberal causes.[29] The Primrose League was quick to seize on such divisions, seeing them as evidence for the importance of men and women working together for party political aims, rather than separately for factional interests. The *Primrose League Gazette* accused the Liberal women of putting women's issues before party loyalty:

> It is not natural for separation by sex to enter into party politics; it is an Oriental fashion not likely to flourish here. If Liberal women only echo the sentiments of Liberal men, why do they want separate organisations of their own? They have no separate opinions to express, and really separate work to do… So soon as a real women's question arises, such as the election to Boards of Guardians and other local bodies, of women as women, and not as politicians, the representative Liberal women at once show a strong and sensible inclination to sink their party for the sake of their sex. Sex associations on general issues are futile, artificial, and to be deprecated…[30]

The split between Liberal women on the suffrage question was a serious one, and it lasted until 1919. The suffragists of the WLF believed that the Liberal creed was inextricably linked with franchise reform, and they were prepared to go as far as considering the idea of refusing to help any anti-suffrage Liberal parliamentary candidate, a proposal which would never have been contemplated by the women of the Primrose League. The latter's reluctance to be pro-active in matters of party policy was taken up by the Liberal women, and at the annual meeting of the WLF Council in June 1896 Mrs Walter Grove made a spirited reply to the criticisms of the *Primrose League Gazette* two months before. Her speech revealed the extent to which Liberal women were prepared to become a lobby group for women's suffrage rather than remain a docile subsidiary of the Liberal Party: '…we should mould Liberalism instead of blindly following it… Some people think it is more statesmanlike to sink sex in creed. My feeling is, why not make political justice to women a first consideration, and a condition of our help?'[31] The Primrose League took great delight in the Liberal confusion, and the determination of its women members to keep the sexes united proved to be highly beneficial to the Conservative cause. The League became 'the principle carrier and fortifier of Conservative principles throughout the nation', and it was acknowledged by many Conservative MPs that 'they had been lifted into Parliament by the influence of the Ladies of the Primrose League'.[32]

The raising of the women's suffrage question in the Primrose League

Although there was widespread agreement that the female members of the Primrose League had more than proved their abilities in the fields of political organisation and campaigning, the women themselves felt it necessary to justify their involvement in party politics on numerous occasions. Their argument was usually based on the benefits that their

increased political participation would bring to the home and to society as a whole, and it was summed up by Baroness Henry De Worms, a prominent Primrose Dame, in the *Primrose League Gazette* in 1887:

> This is not only an age when 'men must work and women must weep'… Women need not neglect their homes because they share the aims and aspirations of their husbands, or fathers, or brothers… the more women interest themselves in subjects of universal importance, the happier are their homes likely to become.[33]

This argument was also used to justify the demand for the parliamentary vote by those Conservative women who supported the women's suffrage campaign, but they never won official support from the Primrose League. The question of female suffrage was always a contentious one for the League, and the ruling bodies steadfastly refused to take a position on the issue or allow any discussion of it at meetings – an approach which was consistent with their policy of refraining from making any political demands on the Conservative Party, and their desire not to upset the status quo. This attitude is typified by the reply to a letter received by the Ladies' Grand Council of the Primrose League in 1885 from the Conservative Frances Power Cobbe, a member of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, which asked the LGC if they would consider supporting the suffrage cause. The brief reply from Lady Borthwick was that the executive committee could not 'enter into questions of contentious politics'.[34] Despite this, there were many occasions on which the issue was raised at habitation meetings, particularly at times when the House of Commons was about to debate the matter, as it did on numerous occasions, or when important changes in local government organisation which affected women were being contemplated.

There is no evidence that any Primrose League habitation concerned itself with the question of women's suffrage until 1888. In May of that year the *Primrose League Gazette* reported that Lady Louisa Knightley had spoken to the Knightley Habitation in Daventry on the question of women's suffrage, and linked it with the County Councils Act which had received its first reading in March, 1888. Eligible women would be able to vote for candidates to these new and powerful local authorities which were being established by the Conservative government, and the link with the larger issue of the parliamentary vote for women was, perhaps, inevitable. Despite the tacit prohibition on speaking about such a divisive issue, Lady Knightley told the habitation that,

> Of course, the Government having taken this very decided step to give the franchise to women in the county, will probably eventually go further, and admit the women to the Parliamentary franchise… Why should women not have votes? They have to pay rates and taxes, and why should they not have a voice in the election of the people who have the spending of the money? (Applause). Women are certainly quite as much concerned in good government as men.[35]

Lady Knightley, who had become a Primrose League Dame in May 1885, and had helped to establish the Knightley Habitation the same year, had always felt her lack of a vote was a great injustice. After accompanying her husband to the polls in November 1885, she had written in her journal: '…he voted for himself while I waited outside and felt, for the first time personally, the utter anomaly of my not having a vote, while Joe Bull has!'[36] Lady Knightley's cause was supported by some Conservative men as well as women. At a Primrose League fete in Alderwasley, Derbyshire, in September 1888, Colonel Pearson, the District Agent, 'congratulated the ladies who are ratepayers on the powers given to them of voting for county councillors', and he added that he hoped, 'that this is the forerunner of their eventually being admitted to the Parliamentary franchise.'[37] At that stage, although women could vote in county council elections, it was unclear as to whether they were eligible to be elected as members of the new authorities. In 1888 the Society for Promoting Women as County Councillors, which had been started by predominantly Liberal women, decided to look for female candidates who would be willing to stand as county councillors, so that the law could be tested on the matter.[38] The Ladies Grand Council of the Primrose League was asked to support the women who had agreed to stand for the new London County Council, but as always they declined to become involved in such matters, although they did urge those Conservative women who were eligible to 'exercise their privilege of voting.'[39] The idea of women running for election to the new local authorities was not officially encouraged either by the League or the Conservative Party at this stage, although voting for male Conservative candidates was actively promoted. Five months later the Conservative peer Lord Meath brought a bill before the House of Lords to enable qualified women to become members of County Councils, but it was rejected by 108 votes to 23.[40]

Towards the end of 1888, the Meltham Habitation, near Huddersfield, gathered to hear an address by Lydia Becker, who, with Millicent Fawcett, was at the forefront of the campaign for women's suffrage.[41] That same year

there had been a split in the women's suffrage movement over the question of party political affiliations. It had been suggested that societies of the Women's Liberal Federation, which broadly supported female enfranchisement, should be able to affiliate to the National Society for Women's Suffrage, but some members of the latter group feared that this would mean that the suffrage campaign would become identified solely with the Liberal Party. As a result the NSWS split into two – the Central National Society for Women's Suffrage arranged to admit these groups, while the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, under the leadership of Becker and Fawcett, decided to remain a staunchly non-party political organisation.

Lydia Becker's appearance at the Primrose League meeting signalled her belief in the importance of political neutrality to the suffrage campaign, and she emphasised that this was the first time she had addressed a Primrose League meeting, although she had addressed many other gatherings in the past. In her address Becker made the point that they were not asking for the vote for married women since that would lose the campaign support, but where women were clearly heads of households (Becker claimed that about 15-20% of tenants of houses were unmarried women and widows) they should have the vote in the same way as men. The *Primrose League Gazette* reported that the meeting passed a resolution in favour of the parliamentary franchise being extended to women, with two dissentients.[42]

There was a great deal of interest was shown in the women's suffrage issue in 1888 – in addition to women gaining the vote in the county council elections, it was also the year when Lord Salisbury made a speech in Edinburgh giving his approval to the principle of female enfranchisement.[43] Although Salisbury emphasised women's potential influence being directed towards the maintenance of morality and religion, he and some Conservative backbenchers believed that eligible, propertied women having the parliamentary vote could be very useful to the Party. However, one of the major criticisms that supporters of a women's suffrage measure had to answer was the imperial context in which those votes would be cast in any parliamentary election. When Lady Knightley and Colonel Pearson made the connection between the competent way in which women had exercised the municipal vote for a number of years, and the preparation that had given them for receiving the parliamentary vote, the leader writer of *The Times* of 4 January 1889 countered their argument with a reply that was supported by many Conservative MPs. After observing that the difference between municipal and imperial power was clearly not understood by the advocates of women's suffrage, the paper went on to

warn that the political experiment of enfranchising women '… might be absolutely fatal if carried out at the centre of executive and legislative authority for the British Empire'.[44]

For the leader-writer and many others, the local vote was not considered to be on a par with the parliamentary vote, which was consistently given what could be called a 'masculine' value – the criteria for exercising it being the possession of physical strength, in order to serve one's country in time of war, a 'masculine' authority which would command respect from the subject peoples of the Empire, and an easy familiarity with a dangerous and crowded public space, which was considered to be a particular threat during general election campaigns. It was not surprising, then, that Conservative and Liberal women who supported women's suffrage made strenuous efforts to 'feminise' the language of the debate, in order to deconstruct what Jon Lawrence has called the 'gendered nature of the franchise' – a phenomenon which had 'helped shape the language, and the practice, of Victorian politics'.[45] They tried to present the idea of a female electorate as being complementary to the male one, rather than in opposition to it, and they suggested ways in which women could contribute to the good government of the Empire, in an attempt to undermine accusations that women's suffrage would only weaken it.

The involvement of Conservative women in the pro and anti-suffrage 'Appeals'

In the summer of 1889 both suffragists and anti-suffragists were given the opportunity to air their views through the medium of the periodical press. Although Lord Salisbury may never have intended to do anything about women's suffrage in a practical way, his Edinburgh speech had triggered off a public debate on the suitability of women to have the parliamentary vote. In a leading article published in May 1889 *The Times* expressed concern about his 'disquieting utterance', and this may have caused some anti-suffragists to think that it was time to launch a more organised campaign to publicise their cause.[46] The following month an important appeal against women's suffrage was published in the *Nineteenth Century*. It was signed by 104 women, and was organised by the prominent anti-suffragist, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, a Liberal Unionist after Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule in 1886, who increasingly supported the Conservative Party. A supplementary list of 2,000 women who had signed a form attached to the original appeal was published in the August number of the periodical – an impressive response.[47] Amongst the signatories to the appeal were a number of Conservative women, including Lady Randolph Churchill, the Dowager

Duchess of Marlborough, and Lady Wimborne, all members of the Ladies Grand Council of the Primrose League, together with prominent Liberals like Lady Frederick Cavendish and Lady Tweedmouth, and activists in the field of social welfare like Louise Creighton and Beatrice Webb (formerly Potter), both of whom subsequently changed their minds and became supporters of the suffrage movement.[48] The belief that the administration of the Empire was an exclusively male enterprise figured as an important factor in the debate, and the progression from having the municipal vote to the granting of the 'imperial' vote was not seen as a logical one:

> …we believe that the emancipating process has now reached the limits fixed by the physical constitution of women, and by the fundamental difference which must always exist between their main occupations and those of men. The care of the sick and the insane; the treatment of the poor; the education of children: in all these matters, and others besides, they have made good their claim to larger and more extended powers. We rejoice in it. But when it comes to questions of foreign or colonial policy, or of grave constitutional changes, then we maintain that the necessary and normal experience of women – speaking generally and in the mass – does not and can never provide them with such materials for sound judgment as are open to men.[49]

The appeal had been signed by both Conservative and Liberal women, although one observer regretted that the list was 'rather too Conservative'.[50] Brian Harrison has rightly pointed out that many of the upper-class women who signed the appeal had enough political influence through their husbands, fathers and brothers, and their circle of friends, for them to feel that having a vote was unnecessary, and Martin Pugh has observed that '… in upper-class circles women had never been invisible nor distant from politics, which often permeated the daily lives of their households… those who had a foot in the citadel had less need to storm the barricades.'[51] Although these anti-suffragists believed that they could bring to political life their particular expertise in social and domestic matters, they remained content to wait for men to legislate on their behalf in order to remedy any remaining injustices against their sex. One of the main contentions of the appeal was that any extension of the vote to married women would bring the spectre of conflict between the sexes and the disruption of the hierarchical order of the traditional family – an argument which was used frequently by anti-suffragist Conservative politicians and members of the Primrose League.

The appeal was quickly seized on by those prominent and influential women in the League who were vehemently against the enfranchisement of women. Lady Jersey was one of the most outspoken and influential of the Conservative anti-suffragists, and she went on to become a leading member of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League which was founded in 1908. Despite being well-known as an eloquent and articulate speaker on the political platform, Lady Jersey was always careful to reassure the men that women were only taking a public role to 'assist in placing men in the Government', and that they were not 'in the least desirous of trenching on any department which does not belong to us; we don't wish to govern the country…'[52] Edith Milner, sister of the prominent Conservative Sir Frederick Milner and the Ruling Councillor of the Milner Habitation in York, spoke consistently against women's suffrage at meetings all over the country, and went on to form a branch of the Anti-Suffrage League in York. She had taken up the cause before the appeal was published, but her arguments were very similar in tone. In April 1889 she was present at a meeting of the Bath Habitation, and 'delivered a well-considered and telling political address' which argued against the enfranchisement of women:

> It would be a disastrous thing for the chivalry of England if women were put into the so-called position of equality with men, which would prevent them being the help-mates which they are now, and would pit them against men… Woman's place is clearly marked out for her. If she can help in her spare time, and circumstances do not compel her to stay at home, let her give what help she can to the cause of politics, to the cause of education, to the cause of religion, to the cause of the country, but do not give women the franchise.[53]

The publication of the appeal in the *Nineteenth Century* caused a great stir, particularly because it reflected the views of women themselves, rather than those of the male politicians. It prompted a swift response from the supporters of women's suffrage led by Millicent Fawcett. The July edition of the *Fortnightly Review* contained a reply which was supported by 2,000 signatures, many of which were printed below a declaration which asked that the parliamentary franchise be granted to women.[54] Each argument against women's suffrage in the appeal was dealt with in the reply, including the idea that having the municipal vote did not necessarily qualify women to exercise the more important 'imperial' vote. Since the passing of the 1884 Reform Bill, which had enfranchised over two million agricultural labourers, it was difficult not to agree with the proposition that the old idea

of the parliamentary vote being a privilege one had to earn had been finally discredited. The reply reflected this way of thinking when it talked of the qualifications needed to be woman elector:

> She will not be required to have a complete mastery of finance, or to take the lead and supervision of commerce, or to direct the discipline of the army and navy, or to have mastered the whole of the recent history of British policy in Egypt, South Africa and India. If no men were allowed to vote unless they obtained a pass in all these subjects, the number of electors would be considerably reduced.[55]

Many critics felt that this argument undermined the concept of the privileged status of the parliamentary vote and therefore, they contended, the women's case was inconsistent, for if they believed that the vote was so unimportant why did women want it so much? For Fawcett and her supporters Parliament was 'the mirror of the nation', and it was important that the particular interests of women should be properly represented there, and not just confined to local politics.

As in the appeal against suffrage, the reply was signed by both Liberal and Conservative women – amongst the Conservative supporters were Lady Rayleigh, Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, and Alice Balfour (the sisters of Arthur Balfour, the future Prime Minister), Lady Dorothy Nevill, the Countess of Meath, and Lady Knightley, the latter commenting in her journal, 'the Fortnightly is out with the counterblast to the protest in last month's 19th Century against women's suffrage. I have signed it among many others'.[56] After the inevitable list of 'the great and the good', the rest of the signatures were sub-divided into occupational categories such as 'social and philanthropic workers', 'poor law guardians', 'registered medical practitioners', and 'education'. Under these headings could be found the middle-class women who were more likely to be Liberal supporters, and who had some experience of independent life away from home and family. Some well-respected Conservative women did appear in this section – Emily Davies, Frances Power Cobbe, Jessie Boucherett, and Louisa Twining, the philanthropist and poor law guardian. These women workers, together with those suffragists who were active in political organisations such as the Primrose League and the Women's Liberal Associations, believed that they had more than proved their fitness to have the vote. As the text of the reply ended, '… the admission of women to representation is an adjustment of their political status, bringing it into harmony with changes which have already taken place in their social, educational, and industrial status.'[57]

One of the results of this very public debate in two eminent journals was that the Grand Council of the Primrose League felt that they should move to discourage the habitations from getting involved in the controversial and divisive issue of women's suffrage. At a meeting in the autumn of 1889, they issued a warning:

> …Habitations cannot take part in meetings for the promotion of women's suffrage, though, of course, members of the League can attend such meetings in their individual capacity. *Vide* Statute X of the Primrose League: 'Habitations shall confine their work to the objects of the League, or to matters in direct harmony therewith'.[58]

The women's suffrage debate within the Primrose League

The influence of prominent anti-suffragists like Lady Jersey and Edith Milner, and the official disapproval of all discussion of the question of women's enfranchisement within the Primrose League, meant that the issue had to be approached with caution by those Conservative women who supported the suffrage cause. When a Mrs. Stanbury went to Grantham, to address a well attended meeting of one of the few women-only habitations on the question of 'Women's Suffrage', she sought to reassure her audience on those questions consistently raised by the anti-suffragists, and to word her speech so as to bring what she believed were the distinctive qualities of women to the language of the whole franchise reform debate:

> She thought that, on the whole, the tendency was for women to purify politics by their presence… she imagined that the generality of those present had taken up political work that they might achieve some sort of domestic reform, and, after all, their legislation in its domestic aspect meant in a great measure the housekeeping of the nation at large… She entirely disbelieved that to give women the suffrage would have a tendency to break up the harmony of family life… she was sure that, as a mother, woman should have the very highest position given her, so that, as well as attending to their food and clothing, she might fit her children for the world.[59]

Mrs. Stanbury's appeal was carefully worded to address the fears of male opponents, and she reassured them on the imperial question – the women she wished to enfranchise would be the mothers of the nation whose vital task it was to equip the empire-builders of the future, both morally and

physically. It was, perhaps, somewhat ironic that the limited franchise did not aim to include married women, but Mrs. Stanbury seemed unaware of the paradox, or she simply ignored it for the purposes of her argument. Since both suffragists and anti-suffragists always assumed that if a limited franchise was passed it would only be a question of time before it was extended, the majority of debates on the women's suffrage question included the issue of married women as a natural part of the discussion. The use of the analogy of 'housekeeping' when referring to domestic and economic matters was popular with women speakers – Lady Knightley had used it in her speech in May 1888 when she asserted that since certain women paid rates and taxes they had a right to elect 'the people who have the spending of the money.'[60] This 'domestication' of the language of the debate was an attempt to convince those Conservative MPs who were against female enfranchisement that women were 'certainly quite as much concerned in good government as men'. Over the years the appeal to a more domestic-centred politics was to be accommodated by the Conservative Party, particularly in response to the increasing importance of social policy after the overwhelming Liberal victory in the general election of 1906.

The desire to couch any plea for limited women's suffrage in terms that would be reassuring to men remained a feature of the speeches of women members of the League who were in favour of such a measure. Although a few activists like Lady Knightley were steadfastly committed to the suffrage cause, the views of some Conservative women on the question seemed to ebb and flow according to the state of opinion amongst the male hierarchy. Lord Salisbury's approval of the principle of female enfranchisement had given some encouragement to Conservative suffragists, and in a speech in July 1891 he reiterated his view that the question of women's suffrage would have to be seriously considered. Three months later Balfour spoke to a large Unionist meeting in Bury along the same lines, and at their annual conference in November the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, taking their cue from the speeches of their leaders, passed a resolution in favour of women's suffrage.[61] In view of these developments it was not surprising that in the run-up to the general election in July 1892 that the discussion surfaced again at habitation meetings, despite the prohibition on the subject by the Grand Council. In December 1891 the *Primrose League Gazette* reported a meeting held by the Bedminster Habitation in Bristol, where a guest speaker read a paper on 'the enfranchisement of women, an ancient right, a modern need'. Mrs. Harriet McIlquham told the meeting that the time was now right to contemplate bringing in a women's suffrage measure:

> The feeling was rapidly gaining ground that before the dissolution of the present Parliament, the enfranchisement of women would be effected. The utterances of Lord Salisbury and Mr. Balfour, and the more recent statements at the National Union of Conservatives' Conference at Birmingham, had raised the hopes of women, and it was possible that at last they were to have political justice.[62]

The *Gazette* went on to report that at the end of the meeting the following resolution was carried unanimously:

> …that in the opinion of the meeting, the enfranchisement of women is one of the most urgent parliamentary reforms, and that a petition be signed by the chairman, on behalf of the meeting, and forwarded for presentation… [asking] the House of Commons to pass a measure of enfranchisement which shall include all duly qualified women.

The strong feelings that were expressed at the Bedminster meeting were unusual, as most Primrose League habitations would have been far more cautious in their approach to the contentious subject of women's suffrage. However, with a general election only months away, and Sir Albert Rollit's suffrage bill being debated in the House of Commons in April 1892, it was hard to suppress discussion of the question. After Gladstone formed his fourth administration in August 1892, the question of the enfranchisement of women became more problematic, for although the extra votes of propertied women might be a useful weapon against the Liberals, if they brought in their own women's suffrage bill it might be too extensive a measure for Conservatives to contemplate. Speakers at Primrose League habitation meetings continued to raise the suffrage issue, but with considerably more circumspection than Mrs. McIlquham had done.

A prolific speaker on the subject was Mrs. Rose Pender, the Ruling Councillor of the Guilsborough Habitation, whose husband, James Pender, was to win what had traditionally been the safe Liberal seat of Mid Northants for the Conservatives in the 1895 general election. At a habitation meeting held on 19th October, 1892, Mrs. Pender 'urged the unmarried ladies present to prepare themselves for the franchise', since she was certain that 'the conferment of the franchise on propertied ladies would result in placing law and order on a sounder basis.'[63] However, she was careful not to seem too enthusiastic, when she added that 'women would be obliged to take a much more energetic part in the public work of the country, whether they

like it or not, owing to the burden of the franchise being thrown upon them.' Rose Pender's views on women's suffrage were as cautious as one might expect from a Conservative woman who took her cue from the men when it came to such controversial subjects. By December 1892 Mrs. Pender was more circumspect when she addressed a special women's meeting in Lincoln, emphasising that she was not a 'Woman's Rights woman', and acknowledging that the question of women's suffrage 'was a dangerous one, owing to the difficulty as to qualifying limit'.[64] During the next two years Mrs. Pender spoke at meetings all over the county on a range of political concerns of interest to Primrose League members, as well as the question of the enfranchisement of women. Towards the end of 1893 she addressed the Hatton Habitation in Wellingborough, and it was reported that she 'delivered an interesting and able speech on women's suffrage', at the end of which a resolution was passed 'in favour of extending the Parliamentary franchise to women, which was… carried unanimously', and then she went on to a large meeting at Brixworth and 'spoke on the question of Women's Suffrage, by special request'.[65]

In July 1895 a Unionist government was returned to office, and in April the following year when Lord Salisbury addressed the AGM of the Grand Council of the Primrose League at Covent Garden, he expressed himself still in favour of female suffrage, although he admitted that 'there is no question… which divides parties more completely'.[66] Now that the Conservatives had power, the propertied woman voter did not seem so important any more, and there was a distinct change of approach to the question of women's suffrage. In November 1895, the *Primrose League Gazette* had warned that 'women's suffrage is a matter of opinion, and not of principle',[67] and Mrs. Pender was swift to sense this change of tack when she spoke at the annual meeting of the Ladies' Grand Council on 15 May 1896. Mrs. Pender fashioned her language to please her more elevated audience, and the tone was different to the speeches she had delivered before the general election:

> Lord Salisbury touched at Covent Garden on the question of female suffrage, and while expressing himself in favour of it, said there were great divergences of opinion even among his own followers… there were great divergences of opinion also in the minds of the women of England. Many ladies … did not quite think that the millennium would arrive when the franchise was given to their sex. They thought it was unwise to place a weapon of such undoubted power in the hands of those who did not know how to make use of it. But in any

> case the Primrose League offered scope for the energies of the most reforming women.… she was one of those women who did not think that the best way to guard their homes and hearths was for the woman to take the weapon out of the man's hand and bid him stand behind. Each had their part to play in life's battle, and though she did not deny that the men's part was the more brilliant, the more interesting, and the most exciting, yet women's work well done was to the full as deserving of gratitude…[68]

Mrs. Pender, like many other Conservative women, was an energetic speaker and worker for the Unionist cause, and many attributed her husband's unexpected victory in the 1895 General Election to her organisational skills. Despite this evidence of self-confidence and political ability, she was careful to use the language of separate spheres when discussing the question of suffrage, stepping over the accepted boundaries when she felt she could, but retreating back when she felt that was the right course of action. Mrs. Pender had considerable sympathy for the suffrage campaign, but she was not prepared to challenge the conventions of the Primrose League, which always claimed that women's participation in the political sphere was merely an extension of their traditional domestic and philanthropic role.

The Ladies' Grand Council moved to support Lord Salisbury's retreat on the question of women's suffrage about nine months after Mrs Pender's speech, and issued a statement which distanced the League from any opinion on the women's suffrage question and reaffirmed that it would continue to confine its activities to 'the furtherance of its three principles; i.e. respect for religion, the support of the constitution, and the Imperial ascendancy of the Empire'.[69] Despite this warning from the Ladies' Grand Council against raising the question of women's enfranchisement, references to the suffrage question continued to be made in speeches to Primrose League habitations over the next few years. However, in their anxiety to avoid the disastrous split over the issue that the Liberal women experienced, the vast majority of its female members firmly believed that 'the League's function was to organise women for the Conservative cause; it was *not* to organise for the cause of women'.[70] The small minority of Conservative women who actively supported women's suffrage used petitions, letters, and personal influence to further their cause, while a few of the more dedicated campaigners, like Emily Davies, Lady Knightley and Lady Strachey, were active members of the constitutional suffrage movement, whose constituent societies were united under the umbrella of the National Union Of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) in 1897.

Conservative women's work in local government

The refusal of the Primrose League to allow the discussion of women's suffrage, the split among Liberal women over the question, and the reluctance of the political parties to adopt the issue as part of their programme, meant that local government became the focus of many women's political activities on an increasing scale from the 1880s onwards. Patricia Hollis, in her definitive research on the participation of women in local government, has identified Liberal (and from the mid 1890s, Socialist) women as the most active and numerous female participants in municipal government during this period, and has detailed their work on School Boards and Boards of Guardians from the 1870s onwards.[71] The commitment of Liberal women to the value of their participation in local government was in contrast to the approach of their Conservative counterparts in the Primrose League. It has been suggested that Conservative women were far more interested in parliamentary elections than local ones since their political agenda tended to focus on the questions of 'high politics', with issues such as opposition to Irish Home Rule, foreign and imperial policy, and constitutional matters dominating Primrose League meetings. The 'low politics' areas of social policy such as public health and sanitation were seen by them as important but of secondary concern, because they were in the realm of the local and domestic – as Hollis has observed, 'Primrose dames were most active at parliamentary elections. Popular patriotism and imperialism lent itself less easily to the sewers and street lighting of local government…'[72] In a speech to the Ladies' Grand Council in 1888 Lady Montagu spoke for many of her colleagues when she expressed the view that the contest between the parties for power was one of the most important reasons for participating in political life: 'For that means the possibility of giving effect to our opinions, of obtaining what we believe to be desirable, of defending what we believe to be valuable, of averting what we believe to be dangerous'.[73]

Although many Conservative women undertook a wide range of philanthropic activities at local and national level, it is true that only a small proportion of them took those interests further by standing for election to Boards of Guardians and School Boards, their presence on the latter bodies reflecting a longstanding interest in the field of education, particularly for girls. In 1870 Emily Davies had been one of two female members elected to the first London School Board, and during the 1880s about a dozen out of almost ninety women on School Boards were supporters of the Conservative Party. One of the most prominent of these was Lucy Bignold, a leading member of the Primrose League in Norwich, and a churchwoman from a philanthropic

backgound who provided school meals from her own purse during her term of office, while another was a Mrs Hancock of Sunderland, who supported women's suffrage, and was described by the *Sunderland Herald* as 'the best man' on the School Board.[74] Although Poor Law work was often seen as a natural extension of their charitable activities, women found entry into the field difficult, since candidates standing for election to Boards of Guardians had to have a ratepayer qualification (unlike members of School Boards), and it was often believed that women Guardians would be too sentimental in their attitudes to the poor. There were some prominent Conservative women Guardians during the 1890s, including Sophia Lonsdale from Lichfield, a fierce anti-suffragist from a strong Anglican background who was a loyal member of the Charity Organization Society, and Mrs Fuller, who sat on the Chippenham Board of Guardians and was the daughter of the prominent Conservative politician Sir Michael Hicks-Beach.[75] Many of the women who put themselves forward for election were reluctant to stand as party candidates, believing that what they were doing was, as one female Guardian put it, 'woman's work' which was 'quite outside politics, whether they be liberal or conservative'. Hollis has claimed that Conservative women on School Boards often felt the same because they believed that 'the service ethic' was more important than 'formal party loyalties'.[76] In fact the Conservative Party had always subscribed to the idea of non-partisan local politics, with many Conservative Associations resisting attempts to persuade them to fight local elections along strict party lines until the early 1890s.[77]

In March 1894 further opportunities for women to enter local politics presented themselves when the ground-breaking Local Government Act was brought in by the Liberal government. This legislation enabled women ratepayers and occupiers (including qualified married women) the right to vote in urban district, rural district and parish council elections, and to stand as candidates. The new legislation also allowed women to stand for election to the London vestries (the equivalent of local councils), and in addition, the property qualification for Poor Law Guardians was abolished. Within a year of the Act the number of women Guardians in England and Wales increased from 159 to almost 900 – mainly because more working class women were encouraged by the Women's Co-operative Guild and the newly emergent ILP to stand for election.[78] Despite these opportunities for greater participation in local government there continued to be a reluctance among many Conservative women to stand for election, and most of them continued to choose to do their political work within the confines of the Primrose League. This caution was in contrast to the approach of the Liberal women, who passed a resolution in May 1894 urging immediate

action by the Women's Liberal Associations to secure 'a due share of representation for women and the industrial and agricultural classes' on the District and Parish Councils and the reformed Boards of Guardians.[79] The following month the Women's Co-operative Guild advised their members to 'choose the right woman, and get the town or village canvassed in her favour… Tell your neighbours why a woman should be elected'.[80]

Despite their limited presence on local Boards and Councils Primrose League women did begin to increase their involvement in local elections as canvassers and voters, although it was more out of a desire to support Conservative policies than to extend their political role. In November 1894 Lord Salisbury made a speech which called on Conservatives to overturn the dominant radical 'Progressive' group on the new London County Council by fighting the forthcoming elections along party lines, and this drew an enthusiastic response from the women of the Primrose League.[81] Fighting radicalism was an essential part of the Conservative philosophy, but there was another matter which involved one of the most important Primrose League principles, 'the maintenance of religion', that inspired Conservative women to enter the fray. In January 1894 a successful resolution had been put forward by the Moderate (Conservative) majority on the London School Board which insisted that a specifically Christian interpretation be applied to any religious instruction, and this caused so much dissent between Moderates and radical Progressives that the School Board elections of November 1894 were fought primarily on this issue.[82] A few months before the elections the Ladies' Grand Council issued a letter to all London habitations alerting them to the importance of rallying Conservative votes for the Moderate cause, and the *Primrose League Gazette* encouraged its readers to support candidates who advocated 'Christian teaching for Christian children by Christian teachers'.[83] The zeal with which many of the female members of the League canvassed and campaigned in the London School Board elections was not accompanied by a call for women to stand for office, although a Primrose League activist, Mrs Dibdin, was voted on to the Board as a Unionist member in 1897.[84] It would not have been inconsistent with party policy to suggest that Conservative churchwomen stand for the Board, but the Ladies' Grand Council insisted that its role was to support the election of their male colleagues and campaign on Unionist principles, and always dismissed the idea that it was working to improve the position of women:

> Although sympathizing most deeply in all women's work… the Ladies' Grand Council is not a Women's Association or a Governing

> Body, only a very small section of the Primrose League occupying itself in aiding and abetting the work of that organization as much as possible.[85]

The Primrose League at the end of the nineteenth century

When the Conservative MP Edward Clarke praised the Primrose League for giving women a harmless outlet for their political energies and therefore putting women's suffrage 'out of the field of practical politics', he forgot the 'thin end of the wedge' argument so popular with his fellow anti-suffragists.[86] The League had provided the basis for predominantly upper class Conservative women to enter political life not only as 'unpaid canvassers', but as disseminators of the core principles of Conservatism – empire, monarchy, religion and the ideal of class unity. In contrast to their Liberal counterparts who brought a commitment to improving the condition of women to their political activities, Conservative women tended to divide their public work into separate compartments. The Primrose League was the arena for carrying out their political campaigning, while away from its influence they were involved in the reforming work of such philanthropic bodies as the Charity Organization Society, the Girls' Friendly Society, and the National Union of Women Workers, the latter two causes specifically dedicated to the welfare of women.[87] Although always subject to the restrictions of the male Grand Council the League had offered Conservative women a vast body of political experience which included the running of election campaigns, public speaking and lecturing, and the organisation of political meetings. The rapid increase in female participation in the political life of the Conservative Party became the 'thin end of the wedge' for anti-suffragist politicians, for as respect for their political skills grew it was inevitable that some women members would seriously question the opposition of so many of their backbenchers to the introduction of a propertied women's franchise.

The Primrose League was considerably more successful in bringing women into the political realm than its rivals. The fact that women and men worked side by side was a restraining factor but also a liberating one – although the League women were pressured into a position of self-censorship on issues like female suffrage they were able to demonstrate their competence in political work, with the result that the men became increasingly dependent on their support. Single-sex organisations gave Liberal women the freedom to discuss and pursue their own political interests, but they experienced more diviseness and arguably were no less marginalised by their party than Conservative women. The choices that

women made about how they wanted to pursue their political activities were influenced by many factors but they invariably centred on whether their party or their concerns as women came first. It could be argued that the pursuit of a self-consciously separate 'feminist' agenda was not necessarily a better strategy than the encouragement of a more 'domestic-centred politics' within the mainstream, if the latter ultimately led to a greater 'feminisation' of the wider political discourse.[88]

The last two years of the nineteenth century saw the deaths of some of the distinguished older members of the Ladies' Grand Council (Lady Glenesk, Lady Lathom, the Duchess of Marlborough, and Lady Salisbury), and although membership figures were still showing a slight increase the Primrose League appeared to have lost the impetus of its early years.[89] While many female members remained content to confine their political work to the League, some of the new generation of Conservative women wanted to become more actively involved in the controversial political questions of the day, rather than confine their activities to an organisation where such issues as women's suffrage were studiously avoided. As the Unionist government entered the twentieth century not only did it have to recover from a victorious but lengthy and costly war in South Africa, it also had to face a change of leadership in 1902 and a series of internal divisions and disputes over future party policies. It was the debate over the form those policies should take that drew a number of Conservative women away from the Primrose League and into new kinds of political organisation during the early years of the Edwardian era.

3

THE CONSERVATIVE RESPONSE IN PARLIAMENT TO THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE QUESTION 1867-1904

The organised campaign to obtain women's parliamentary suffrage spanned just over fifty years, from 1866 and the first formal petition delivered to Parliament by the Liberal John Stuart Mill, to the achievement of a limited franchise for women in 1918. During that time there were two major electoral Reform Bills, one in 1867 introduced by the Conservative leader in the House of Commons, Disraeli, which enfranchised much of the urban working class, and the 1884 Bill, introduced by the Liberal leader Gladstone, which brought the agricultural labourer into the electorate. On each occasion unsuccessful amendments to include qualified women were rejected by the House of Commons, and throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, private members bills brought by Liberal, Conservative, and later, Labour MPs also failed, since they could never progress far without the support of the government in power. For reasons of overriding political necessity, and occasionally, personal hostility, and because, particularly in the Conservative case, there seemed to be no compelling need for change, the leadership of the two main parties were reluctant to sponsor a bill officially.[1]

The Parliamentary Conservative Party and the question of women's suffrage

The 1867 Reform Bill was far more radical than had been anticipated, and the extension of household suffrage in the boroughs almost doubled the number of voters, giving rise to a fear among many Conservatives that it

would make a further expansion of the electorate inevitable.[2] The future Lord Salisbury was not only concerned about the possibility of class conflict but full of foreboding about the whole principle of extending the franchise to men who had no stake in the country apart from their labour:

> We still think, as we have always thought, that to give the power of taxation to those from whom no taxes are exacted, the supreme disposal of property to those who have no property of their own, the guidance of this intricate machine of government to the least instructed class in the community, is to adopt in the management of the empire principles which would not be entertained for a moment in any other department of human affairs.[3]

The assumption behind this argument was that those who were educated, paid taxes and owned property were entitled to the parliamentary vote, and this point was made by Mill in his speech to the House of Commons in support of his amendment to the Reform Bill which asked for women to be enfranchised on the same terms as men. As well as citing justice as one of the main principles of his argument, Mill appealed to an idea of individual citizenship coupled with a distrust of unfettered democracy when he asked whether

> …women who manage an estate or conduct a business – who pay rates and taxes, often to a large amount, and frequently from their own earnings – many of whom are responsible heads of families … are not capable of a function of which every male householder is capable?[4]

The argument that the ownership of property and the payment of taxes entitled them to the franchise was one which was used frequently by the Conservative women who became involved in the campaign for female suffrage. Frances Power Cobbe put the case succinctly when she pointed out that 'by identifying the duty of ratepaying with the right of voting in the case of men, the Reform Bill has made more glaring than before the inconsistency of enforcing rates upon women while refusing to them the avowedly corresponding right'.[5] As the scope of the franchise increased during the second half of the nineteenth century, the humiliation of knowing that a semi-educated working man had a vote while they remained without one was to persuade an increasing number of Conservative women from the middle and upper classes to tacitly support the work of the suffrage societies.

Mill's amendment was overwhelmingly defeated by 121 votes in a short debate that was characterised by expressions of impatience at the need to get

on with more important business. Those who supported the amendment were predominantly Liberals – 44.4% of Liberal MPs who voted in the division were in favour of the measure, with 55.6% against – while only 8.7% of Conservative MPs who voted were in favour, with 91.3% against.[6] Supporters of women's suffrage had hoped that they might obtain Conservative as well as Liberal support for Mill's amendment, since Disraeli had on occasions expressed his support for a limited women's franchise. He had alluded to the principle in the House of Commons as early as 1848, and not long after the passing of the 1867 Bill, in a letter written on 29 April 1873 when he was Leader of the Opposition, he told the Conservative MP William Gore Langton that there existed a serious anomaly that should be addressed:

> …that the Parliamentary franchise attached to a household or property qualification, when possessed by a woman, should not be exercised, though in all matters of local government, when similarly qualified, she exercised this right. As I believe this anomaly to be injurious to the best interests of the country, I trust to see it removed by the wisdom of Parliament.[7]

Many years later, Lady Knightley, the Conservative suffragist, recorded in her diary a possible reason for Disraeli's interest. Montague Corry, his private secretary, had revealed that Disraeli 'thought the extension of the suffrage to duly qualified women would be a great barrier against universal suffrage.'[8] Lady Knightley had been an early convert to the cause of the enfranchisement of women as a result of the influence of her two Conservative cousins, Jessie and Louisa Boucherett, but she held typically Conservative views about franchise reform, and always stood by her belief in 'the governing power of the few', which meant limiting the vote to the propertied classes.[9]

The 1867 Reform Act might have been the opportunity for Disraeli to enfranchise women, since he had been persuaded to extend the franchise far beyond what had been expected, but he did not pursue the idea, for as Bruce Coleman suggests, 'He was ready …to give conservatism a contemporary, even populist flavour… but this capacity for adaptation produced more novelty in presentation than in substance.'[10] There was some interest in the idea of enfranchising women from the Conservative side – eleven Conservative MPs had voted for Mill's amendment.[11] Conservative support increased to 31 votes, when, in 1870, Jacob Bright the radical Liberal MP obtained a majority of 33 for the second reading of

his women's suffrage bill. This time 43.1% of Conservative votes were in favour, and 56.9% against, while out of the total Liberal vote 64.6% were for and 35.4% were against (see table 1). However, despite the initial success of his bill it was rejected in committee when the Liberal Prime Minister Gladstone expressed his opposition to the legislation and reversed the Liberal vote. Three similar bills introduced in successive years never even reached the committee stage.[12]

The Conservative approach to married women and the vote

When the Liberal government was defeated in the general election of 1874, the responsibility for raising the suffrage question passed from Jacob Bright to the Conservative MP for Marylebone, William Forsyth. Bright had always asked that women be given the vote on the same terms as men,

Table 1
House of Commons divisions on women's suffrage bills during the 1870s

	Of Cons votes – % for	Of Cons votes – % against	Of Liberal votes – % for	Of Liberal votes – % against	Of Irish Nat. votes – % for	Or Irish Nat. votes – % against
4 May 1870	43.1	56.9	64.6	35.4		
12 May 1870a	27.3	72.7	32.0	68.0		
3 May 1871	33.1	66.9	46.3	53.7		
1 May 1872	24.0	76.0	48.9	51.1		
30 April 1873	31.0	69.0	47.8	52.2		
7 April 1875b	35.4	64.6	54.4	45.6	66.7	33.3
26 April 1876	28.5	71.5	50.3	49.7	64.3	35.7
19 June 1878	19.9	80.1	58.1	41.9	70.0	30.0
7 March 1879c	15.6	84.5	53.0	47.0	60.0	40.0

a Committee stage of the 4 May Bill
b The Conservative MP William Forsyth's bill
c This was a resolution in favour of women's suffrage and not a bill

Notes: The 1877 bill was talked out. 57 Irish Nationalist MPs entered the House of Commons as a result of the 1874 general election. Voting figures including tellers are taken from HC Debates and Harrison, B., *Separate Spheres*, pp.28-9.

which in practice meant as either independent property owners or ratepayers, which excluded most married women. There had always been considerable debate over the question of whether married women were entitled to the franchise, for there was a strongly held view that they did not need a vote because of the legal principle of 'coverture'. The Municipal Corporations (Franchise) Act of 1869 had given women the local vote on the same terms as men, but as a result of a legal ruling in 1872 no married woman ratepayer could exercise her municipal vote in the boroughs.[13] William Forsyth agreed to introduce a women's parliamentary suffrage bill on condition that there was a specific reference to the exclusion of married women inserted into the text, as not only did he believe in the principal of 'coverture', but he also felt that this would be a precaution against legal loopholes, and would encourage support for his proposal. Lydia Becker, the secretary of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, agreed to the change with great reluctance and despite much opposition from her radical colleagues, since she believed that 'the purely electoral law' should be kept 'clear from the complications of the marriage law' and 'should not, take cognizance of the fact of marriage in the case of either women or men'.[14] The 1882 Married Women's Property Act would change the position of some women as regards the ownership of their property, but the main concern of suffragists at this stage was to secure a small measure of enfranchisement which they believed would be more acceptable to MPs.

The question of married women was to prove a problem for years to come – MPs who were reluctant to extend the franchise often used their exclusion as an excuse to vote against a bill, while genuine believers in the idea that married women should be included in any women's suffrage bill found it difficult to vote for anything that could be seen as a half measure. Although Sandra Holton has suggested that 'the exclusionist approach appeared narrow, directed by Conservative Party interests', it is clear that in the early debates on the question there were some Liberal MPs who preferred a limited franchise to be granted to women, despite very real fears that these property-based votes would go to the Conservatives.[15] Because of the fear of alienating the majority of MPs, and also because it was believed that the House of Lords would surely throw out any measure that might threaten the status quo, future suffrage bills would continue to be based on qualifications which implicitly excluded most married women.

Forsyth's alteration to the wording of the Bill appeared to have only a minimal effect, and despite hundreds of petitions sent in by suffragists it was defeated by 35 votes on 8 April 1875. There was an increased

Conservative vote in favour of women's suffrage, but it was negligible; however the Liberal vote was considerably improved (see table 1). Such was the concern over the amount of support for the Bill that a small group of anti-suffragist MPs joined together to form a Committee for Maintaining the Integrity of the Franchise on 23 June 1875. The committee was dominated by Conservative MPs, and included such names as Lord Randolph Churchill, Henry Chaplin, Henry Raikes and Alexander Beresford Hope. The stated object of the group was to organise 'for the purpose of maintaining the integrity of the franchise, in opposition to the claims for the extension of the Parliamentary suffrage to women'. It was the first time that anyone had formally organised against women's suffrage, but after canvassing hard against the 1878 Bill the organisation faded away, perhaps persuaded that such legislation would never be enacted.[16]

The Conservative Party and the women's suffrage debate of 1878

After Forsyth's Bill was defeated in 1875, the proposed legislation reverted to its previous form, and married women were not specifically mentioned in the text. It was re-submitted unsuccessfully in 1876, 1877, and 1878, when the Bill passed into the care of the Liberal MP for Liskeard, Leonard Courtney. The second reading of the Women's Disabilities Removal Bill took place in the House of Commons on 19 June 1878, and the arguments for and against the measure were ones which would be used repeatedly in future debates. Many of the Liberal speakers supported female enfranchisement, but thought that it was probably best that married women were not included, since, as Leonard Courtney argued, 'politics may become a subject of domestic dissension.'[17] Other Liberal MPs mentioned the satisfactory way in which women had begun to participate in local politics, and maintained that women had an interest in the framing of laws which dealt with matters that concerned them as a sex. The majority of Conservative speakers were against the idea of women's suffrage – from a party point of view there had been more than enough electoral reform already, and even likely Conservative voters such as propertied women were not wanted to swell what many thought was an over-large electorate which might easily fall under the influence of socialism. An instinctive urge to hold back the desire for change gave rise to a number of arguments used by some Conservative backbenchers in the 1878 debate, many of which would be used by them in successive parliamentary debates on the suffrage question. The speech by R. W. Hanbury, Conservative MP for North Staffordshire, contained a great many of these reservations, particularly the question of whether women were capable of exercising what some called 'the imperial vote':

> Among all my acquaintances I do not know a single woman who takes an interest in the matter, or wishes to have a vote … there is a great difference between a local franchise and the general franchise which it is sought to give to women now. No doubt in the boroughs women who are largely interested where property is concerned have a vote, and I do not know that they use it badly; but there is nothing like the same excitement about those elections that there is about Imperial Elections. Women are not there thrown into the turmoil and bitterness of public life that prevail in General Elections. Again, at General Elections, there arises the great question of the defence of the country, to which women contribute in no sort of way; and it certainly seems to me that the responsibilities and the rights of citizenship ought to go together. Since the franchise has been so largely extended, we have introduced almost too much sentiment into our political life… We are placed to a great extent at the mercy of mobs, and that danger would be greatly increased if women were added to the number of our voters.[18]

In addition, Hanbury also used the well tried ploy of many anti-suffragists – that of arguing against a Bill because married women were being implicitly excluded from the franchise, while clearly intending to vote against any kind of legislation whether it included married women or not. Hanbury's speech contained almost all the classic Conservative anti-suffrage arguments, and, as Brian Harrison has maintained in his definitive work on the anti-suffrage campaign, although the Conservatives 'always contributed a hard core of opposition to women's suffrage from John Stuart Mill's motion in 1867 to the final gaining of equal franchise in 1928 … many of these fears were shared by "reasonable men of the centre" drawn from both major political parties.'[19]

The 1878 Bill was defeated by 80 votes and there was a considerable swing against women's suffrage on the part of Conservative MPs. On this occasion 80.1% of Conservatives votes were against, while only 19.9% were in favour, compared to 64.6% against, and 35.4% for Forsyth's Bill in 1875.[20] In his speech in the debate the Conservative John Gorst noted with regret the absence of his front bench colleagues, but many backbenchers must have taken their cue from the row of empty seats, and voted accordingly. The relatively small pro-suffrage Conservative vote suffered severe losses during their period of office from 1874 to 1880 – there were four divisions on the question of women's suffrage, and in each successive one the percentage of Conservative votes for the measure declined, while the percentage of votes against rose quite steeply.[21]

While they were in power most Conservatives did not see the need for any extension to the franchise, but their tune could change when the Liberals were in office. This pragmatic approach to the question of women's suffrage was demonstrated by Sir Stafford Northcote, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who told a deputation of women led by the Conservative Lady Anna Gore Langton in 1877, 'I am bound to say, speaking quite frankly, that I do not think the present a particularly desirable time for reopening the great electoral question.'[22] However, in the debate on the Liberal Reform Bill of 1884, Northcote voted in favour of women's suffrage, and argued that ' … women … of education and of gentle character, who are, perhaps, living as widows, and taking care of their families … have every right to be consulted as to who should be the man sent up to represent the constituency in which they live'.[23] There is no doubt that the idea of an extension to the franchise to include propertied women who were potential Conservative voters always seemed a more attractive idea when the Liberals were in power.

Women's Suffrage and the 1884 Reform Bill

In 1880 the Liberals came to power under Gladstone, and in 1884 a Reform Bill was placed before the House of Commons which would increase the electorate by 2.5 million men to make a total of 5.6 million voters. This seemed to suffragists to provide the ideal opportunity to put forward a women's suffrage amendment in the hope that it would get through on the coat tails of the Bill, and it was introduced by the Liberal MP for Stoke-on-Trent, William Woodall.[24] Woodall's amendment asked that: 'For all purposes connected with, and having reference to, the right to vote at Parliamentary elections, words in the Representation of the People Acts importing the masculine gender include women.'[25] By 1884 the question of the enfranchisement of women had been discussed in Parliament on numerous occasions, and this time the issue was given an extra impetus by the passing of the Married Women's Property Act in November 1882, which had given married women the capacity to retain ownership of their separate property, thus adding extra ammunition to their claim to be included in any future legislation. Liberal votes in favour of women's suffrage were holding up well, although it remained important to secure even larger numbers, and there continued to be a small body of Conservative support as long as women only asked for a limited franchise based on a property qualification.

Suffragist women, including Conservatives like Lady Louisa Knightley, felt optimistic about the chances of Woodall's amendment getting through.

She went to the House of Commons to hear the arguments for herself, and wrote in her journal on 10 June 1884, '…I was just in time for the discussion on Woman's Suffrage. Mr Woodfull [sic.] moved it as a new clause to the Franchise Bill in a very sensible, temperate speech putting the points well.'[26] In the event it was Gladstone, the Liberal Prime Minister, who influenced many of the Liberal supporters to change their votes, with a speech that Lady Knightley described in her diary. 'Then came Mr Gladstone … emphatically declining to burden the Franchise Bill with so large an addition. He spoke with fire and eloquence and was listened to with attention by a very full house.'[27] Gladstone was never a supporter of women's suffrage for moral as well as political reasons, and on this occasion he felt that he had genuine motives of political expediency for asking that Liberals support him in rejecting the amendment. The Prime Minister ignored the detail of Woodall's argument, but in response to the latter's question '…we are told that, by the passing of this Amendment, we shall imperil the Bill … but we have no information given us as to where lies the peril', Gladstone uttered the much quoted lines – 'we deprecate the introduction of new matter into this Bill. The cargo which the vessel carries is, in our opinion, a cargo as large as she can carry safely.'[28] Although maintaining that he would not comment on the fitness of women for the franchise on that particular occasion, Gladstone used the kind of language that conveyed to his listeners, both inside and outside the House of Commons, the religious fervour with which he viewed the position of women in society:

> This is … one of those questions which it would be intolerable to mix up with purely political and Party debates. If there be a subject in the whole compass of human life and experience that is sacred, beyond all other subjects, it is the character and position of women.[29]

The belief that women were too spiritually elevated and refined to become involved in the rough and tumble of the political arena was to prevent Gladstone from ever having any sympathy with the idea of granting the parliamentary franchise to women, and this notion was shared by an important but gradually dwindling minority of Liberal and Conservative MPs.[30]

Gladstone's particular emphasis on the issue being free from party considerations was a recurring theme in the women's suffrage debate, and was to caused divisions between suffragists which increased over the years. Moderate leaders of the women's suffrage movement like Lydia Becker and

Millicent Fawcett had always thought it sensible to look for support from both political parties, and this was an acceptable tactic in the early years of the campaign, when it was possible to draw support from the 'independent' member with a tradition of cross-bench voting. However, towards the end of the century, in the changed atmosphere of a more rigid party politics which was exacerbated by the deep divisions caused by the Irish Home Rule controversy, the policy of the women's suffrage movement became increasingly ineffective. Martin Pugh has identified the effect of these changes on political outcome: '…governments ceased to be able to rely upon support from oppositions which now criticized everything but without prospect of defeating anything. All now turned upon maintaining the allegiance of one's own party majority…'[31] However, most of the suffrage campaigners, both inside and outside parliament, continued to regard the issue of female enfranchisement as free of 'party' politics, and this meant that they did not pressure the parties to put the measure into their official political programmes. Writing about the Woodall debate in her journal, Lady Knightley particularly praised the speech of Stansfeld, the Liberal MP, but she neglected to mention his perceptive and prophetic reply to Gladstone's insistence that the women's suffrage issue was outside party politics:

> … these words of the Prime Minister drive and compel us to a Division; for what do they mean but this – that this question is never to go beyond the stage of a private Member's Bill. But private Members' Bills do but prepare the way. Legislation upon a subject like this is not possible by a private Member's Bill. It is only by making it part of a Government measure that it can succeed.[32]

Many Liberal MPs were persuaded by Gladstone's argument that the Reform Bill might be lost, and even convinced suffragists decided they had better vote against the amendment, while Conservatives who were normally opposed to women's suffrage voted for the amendment in order to obstruct the progress of the Bill. The contrariness of the whole debate was summed up by the Liberal MP A. Illingworth, who confessed that he was a suffragist who would vote reluctantly against the amendment. He believed that the 'sudden conversion' to the enfranchisement of women of so many Conservative MPs was 'nothing but a trick and a trap, which has been laid in order that the great Liberal Party may fall into it.'[33] Woodall's amendment was defeated, and a depressed Lady Knightley commented in her journal, '…Mr Gladstone's declaration had had its effect & we were beaten by an overwhelming majority of 271 to 135. I begin to doubt its

passing in my time.'[34] Lady Knightley had good reason to believe that the suffrage cause had suffered a grievous blow – the total number of votes cast against the amendment was the largest number ever returned in a parliamentary division on the question of British women's suffrage.[35] Although many believed that this had been the best chance women had had up to then to secure a suffrage measure, they overestimated the loyalty of many Liberal men to the women's cause. It is impossible to know whether the Reform Bill really would have been threatened if some strong-minded Liberals had held out for the amendment.

In the aftermath of the defeat of the Woodall amendment the debate on women's suffrage was continued in the columns of the Conservative *National Review*. In January 1885 the journal published an anti-suffrage article by the Conservative MP Henry Cecil Raikes, who had become disturbed by the extent of support for female enfranchisement, despite the overwhelming defeat of the Woodall amendment.[36] While he believed that the convictions of some Conservative men were sincerely held, he was scornful of those who appeared to support women's suffrage for party advantage and not because they were genuinely committed to the principle. Raikes challenged such opportunism and asked: 'Is it the mission of the Conservative Party to conserve society, or have its members only to seek to conserve the Conservative Party? … Are we to embark upon the unnatural yet futile task of unsexing English womanhood, because it is conjectured that the nobler instincts of Englishwomen may be utilized for electioneering purposes?' Far from preventing 'an uncontrolled Democracy' as Disraeli had believed, Raikes alleged that enfranchising women would benefit those radicals who hoped that 'political and civil equality thus achieved will bring with them also that social equality of which they dream'.[37]

Raikes alleged that female suffrage was often demanded because of adherence to 'abstract doctrines' of women's rights which claimed that it 'would serve to leaven the electorate with a purifying and elevating influence as regards political questions generally'. However, he suggested that the new female electorate would not be from a refined upper class, but would mainly consist of a 'flood of washerwomen and sempstresses' who were too concerned with the daily cares of life to understand political issues.[38] Raikes maintained that Conservatives rejected the intellectual speculation of the Radicals and favoured the 'sober light afforded by experience' when it came to the question of the relations between the sexes, and that experience taught that 'the tie that links the sexes owes its origin to a profound appreciation of their essential and absolute inequality',

and giving women the vote would be certain to lead to 'an antagonism of the sexes'.[39]

Two months later a reply to Raikes' article was published in *The National Review* by Philip Vernon Smith, a Conservative lawyer and churchman, who outlined a number of pragmatic reasons for his support for a limited measure of female enfranchisement.[40] He argued that the introduction of the Secret Ballot and the Corrupt Practices Acts had addressed the problem of women being exposed to undue influence when voting, and he asserted that when 'the trustee classes' abdicated their responsibility for limiting the franchise to a small number of qualified representatives and gave the vote to large numbers of people, the woman householder became as entitled to a vote as the agricultural labourer. However, the main reason for his support was the same one that Disraeli had given – that enfranchising a small proportion of women would stave off the introduction of adult suffrage, and therefore 'add stability to our Constitution'.[41] One of the interesting things about the debate between the two men, both of whom were committed Anglican churchmen, was the different way in which they used their religion to support their cause. For Raikes woman 'was the weaker vessel', and Christian civilisation had helped to ameliorate her lowly condition 'not by outraging, but by observing, the laws of Nature', while Vernon Smith put great emphasis on each woman's equality before God: 'Christian civilization recognises the essential equality of man and woman as human beings'.[42]

Raikes' *National Review* article contained a number of stereotypical views on women's suffrage held by Conservative politicians which continued to be articulated well into the twentieth century. He had identified two main kinds of Conservative suffragist – the first were men like John Gorst, Lord John Manners and Sir Stafford Northcote who sincerely supported the enfranchisement of women and held that it would be beneficial to society; the second were men like the late Lord Beaconsfield, who had believed it would help to prevent the introduction of adult suffrage and that propertied women voters would benefit the Conservative Party electorally, but were never committed enough to consistently support the introduction of the measure. Raikes himself appeared to be the representative Conservative anti-suffragist, believing as he did that women's suffrage would not only open the door to the extension of democracy and therefore harm rather than benefit the electoral fortunes of the Conservative Party, but would also damage irrevocably the stability of the constitution, society, and the relations between the sexes.

Despite the defeat of the women's suffrage amendment the 1884 Reform Bill itself was of some benefit to the suffrage cause, and to the politicisation

of Conservative women. Firstly, the expansion of the electorate meant that the notion of the vote being a privilege rather than a right suffered a serious blow, with the result that many educated middle and upper-class women came to believe that they had as much right to the franchise as any working class man. Secondly, with the increase in the electorate and the changes to the constituencies came the need for the Conservatives to develop an efficient organisation that could maintain support for the party between elections, and at election time itself, and this highlighted the importance of the work of the Primrose League. As has already been discussed in the previous chapter the League was to bring large numbers of Conservative women into politics as speakers, organisers, canvassers and fundraisers, and it gave some of them the experience they needed to campaign for women's suffrage in later years.

Lord Salisbury and women's suffrage

Although the 1884 vote was considered by many to be the last word on the matter, Conservative suffragists took heart from the fact that Lord Salisbury, the leader of the party, appeared to give his approval to the idea of female suffrage.[43] In a speech given when Prime Minister in Edinburgh on 30 November 1888, he said:

> …I do earnestly hope that the day is not far distant when women also will bear their share in voting for members of Parliament – (cheers) – and in determining the policy of the country. I can conceive no argument by which they are excluded. It is obvious that they are abundantly as well fitted as many who now possess the suffrage, by knowledge, by training, and by character – and that influence is likely to weigh in a direction which, in an age as material as ours, is exceedingly valuable – namely, in in the direction of morality and religion.[44]

This speech was to be often quoted by Conservative suffragists, but, like his predecessor Disraeli, Salisbury never went any further with the idea of granting women the parliamentary franchise. His particular emphasis on the role women could play in defending one of the Conservative Party's most important principles – 'the maintenance of religion' – was connected with his devout Anglicanism, and his belief that women were the proper guardians of the moral sphere. Richard Shannon has observed that 'Salisbury regarded defence of the Church of England and religion as the primary duty of a Conservative statesman', and this view is confirmed by

Salisbury's attack on the Liberals during the 1885 general election campaign, when he accused some of them of considering a disestablishment of the Churches of England and Scotland.[45] He was also anxious to defend and maintain the Church of England voluntary schools which were being undermined by Liberal proposals to extend the state system of undenominational 'board' schools, and this inspired a vigorous grassroots campaign to defend the voluntary schools led by Conservative women.

Salisbury did mention the subject of women's suffrage on at least two occasions after his 1888 speech. On 15 July 1891 he addressed a dinner at the United Club, and, perhaps in anticipation of the general election the following year, referred to the suffrage question: 'I am bound, for the sake of record, and not to seem to have altered my opinion, to say that in my judgment whenever the question of the franchise is brought up, the question of releasing the restrictions which are now imposed on the voting of women will have to be considered.[46] This assurance, and the remark of his nephew and Chief Secretary for Ireland, Arthur Balfour, at a Unionist meeting in Bury that 'if you really mean to go in and deal with the anomalies of representation in the spirit of statesmen, you are bound to have Women's Suffrage', gave further encouragement to Conservative suffragists.[47] However, these statements were followed by a more measured reference from Salisbury at a Primrose League meeting at Covent Garden in April 1896. In his speech he praised the contribution of Conservative women to political life but confessed that his views on female enfranchisement were not shared by everyone:

> I am one of those – I speak only for myself individually – who are of opinion [sic] that women have not the voice they ought to have in the selection of the representatives of the English people, but I warn you that there is no question at present which divides parties more completely, and that I am not certain that even I express the opinion of the majority of my own party, but however that may be, whether they obtain or whether they do not obtain any foremost share in directing the political course of this country, there can be no doubt that their action through the machinery of the Primrose League has largely modified the development of our political history (cheers).[48]

Although Salisbury genuinely believed that women could influence society for good he could detect no great pressure for women's suffrage in the country at large, so it seemed foolish to upset his backbenchers unnecessarily. His concern that the widening of the franchise would lead to

expressions of discontent and hostility from the masses seemed to be unfounded, and because of his clever handling of the 1885 Redistribution Act negotiations he had created the conditions for the Conservative Party to garner more votes in the new urban single-member constituencies, although this was not clear at the outset. Giving the franchise to propertied women might secure more votes for the party, but Salisbury, pragmatic as ever, balanced the arguments and did nothing. He chose to ignore the argument for a tactical approach to women's suffrage that Lady Knightley put forward in her journal of 25 May 1889, 'I believe it will, if granted now, be the best possible barrier against manhood suffrage.'[49] Instead, the Conservative leader seemed more inclined to listen to the counsel of his wife, who wrote to Lady Frances Balfour on 11 February 1897: 'No, I don't agree with you about Suffrage. What earthly good will it do to any woman to have a vote? And, then it must lead to manhood Suffrage, the moment the other side come in again. That is the worst of a Conservative majority passing Liberal measures.'[50]

Two Conservative suffrage bills in the 1890s

After the defeat of his women's suffrage amendment on 12 June 1884 William Woodall tried to obtain leave to bring in the bill again in November, but although there was a majority in favour the second reading was deferred. The momentum of the women's suffrage campaign was continued by a few dedicated Liberal MPs and one Conservative, Baron Dimsdale, and there were unsuccessful attempts to introduce at least one or more suffrage bills or resolutions in favour of the measure every year from 1885 to 1891. The only other division on the issue before 1892 was in 1886 when the Liberal Leonard Courtney sought to reintroduce Woodall's bill.[51] One interesting development during the late 1880s was the formation in 1887 of a committee of MPs who were supportive of female enfranchisement, at the instigation of Lydia Becker. The idea was that this group would liaise with the suffrage societies to promote the suffrage cause, and at a meeting held in the House of Commons on 10 June 71 MPs joined the group, including some Conservatives, led by Captain Edwards Heathcote.[52]

There was virtually no productive debate in the House of Commons on the subject until Sir Albert Rollit's bill had its second reading in April 1892. Rollit was the Conservative MP for South Islington from 1886 until 1906 and had an interesting background. He was born into a middle-class family in Hull in 1842 and became a successful solicitor and later a shipowner; he subsequently strongly opposed the idea of tariff reform, with the result that

after 1906 he became a Liberal Party supporter. He was deeply involved in local politics, becoming Mayor of Hull in 1883 and President of the Municipal Corporations Association, and was a staunch advocate of the widening of local government powers. His knowledge of local politics gave him a valuable insight into the active role that women played on local Boards of Guardians and School Boards, and this, combined with their responsible attitude to the exercise of the local vote, were among the stated reasons why he sponsored a women's suffrage bill in 1892.[53]

Rollit was also a prominent member of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, and only the previous year, at the annual conference held in Birmingham, they had invited Millicent Fawcett to speak on women's suffrage. Fawcett understood the priorities of her audience very well, and her speech made much of the number of women landowners that might be added to the electorate if a bill granting women the parliamentary vote based on a property qualification was passed. She left it to her audience to draw the conclusion that many of those women would be Conservatives. At the end of the debate a resolution in favour of a limited franchise for women was carried, as it had been in 1887.[54] Pugh has commented that it was understandable that the National Union should be sympathetic to the suffrage cause: 'It tended to attract Conservatives who were keen on effective organization and winning elections: such people were in a good position to appreciate the contribution of Primrose Dames as workers and potential voters'.[55] Despite the fact that the National Union was more a 'talking shop' than a decision-making body and their resolutions were not binding on the leadership, Rollit must have been influenced by these endorsements by respected provincial activists, and he was determined to take their concerns to Westminster.[56]

His bill was based on the municipal franchise, and if passed, the parliamentary vote was to be granted to 'every woman who in Great Britain is registered as an elector for any Town Council or County Council or who in Ireland is a ratepayer entitled to vote at an election for Guardians of the Poor, shall be entitled to be registered as a Parliamentary elector, and when registered, to vote at any Parliamentary election for the county, borough, or division wherein the qualifying property is situate'.[57] This meant that the vast majority of married women would be excluded from voting, since the franchise would be based on a property qualification, and this aspect of the bill caused considerable dissent amongst the more radical suffragists, particularly the members of the Women's Franchise League (WFL), a small group founded in 1889 to campaign for the inclusion of married women in any suffrage legislation. In April 1892, at a meeting held in St James' Hall,

London, in support of Rollit's bill, members of the WFL stormed the platform, claiming that the bill was 'class legislation aimed to enfranchise only wealthy women, while excluding married women, and women lodgers'.[58] Those Conservative women who supported women's suffrage would have disagreed with the language of that analysis, but would have agreed with Rollit's aim, which was to enfranchise only propertied women from the middle and upper classes. Philippa Levine has observed that, 'Conservative women, more particularly, leapt upon the contrast between the exclusion of middle-class women, and the gradual extension of voting rights to working men, to what Cobbe called "rabble of illiterates" ', and she has also quoted, in a critical context, Kathleen McCrone's contention that middle-class women like many of the Conservative suffragists were 'more concerned with bourgeois ascendancy than women's rights'.[59]

It is true that a growing preoccupation with the idea of a 'socialist threat' had taken hold in the Conservative Party during the 1880s, and some believed that giving the vote to propertied women would help to prevent the introduction of manhood suffrage by the Liberal Party. As has already been discussed, there was a widespread assumption that the spectre of socialism would lead to 'a serious war of classes', and that it was only a matter of time before newly enfranchised working men would be demanding the transfer of property, and money in the form of taxes, to carry out the social reforms that the socialists had convinced them they needed.[60] This apprehension had increased in 1891, when the Liberal party adopted the 'Newcastle Programme', which promised a radical agenda of reforms, including the disestablishment of the Scottish and Welsh churches, Irish Home Rule, the expansion of local government, and reform of the franchise.[61] Conservative women were as fearful as the men of the consequences of such a programme should the Liberals be returned to power – Lady Knightley, in a speech made just after the Rollit Bill was debated, warned her listeners that the introduction of another Irish Home Rule Bill might lead to 'civil war'.[62]

The threat of Liberal reforms, combined with a number of poor by-election results during the latter part of their period in power, meant that Conservative MPs were particularly anxious about the 1892 General Election that was due to be held shortly after the Rollit debate. As a result of these pressures their attitude to the proposed enfranchisement of propertied women was more positive than usual. Although it had always been emphasised that the question of female suffrage was a non-party issue, when suffrage bills came up for debate in the House of Commons party allegiances could become important, depending on the political situation at

the time. In the Rollit debate the Conservative leader in the House of Commons, Arthur Balfour, spoke strongly in favour of the bill, cleverly turning the promises made by the Liberals against them, and using the familiar argument of 'no taxation without representation':

> I understand one plank of the Newcastle platform was One Man One Vote… yet the very gentlemen who say they are going to bring forward that programme at this moment absolutely refuse to admit the validity of a single one of these arguments when they are directed towards enfranchising not the least worthy class of the community, but what I believe to be one of the worthiest classes. You will give a vote to a man who contributes nothing to taxation but what he pays on his beer, while you refuse enfranchisement to a woman because she is a woman, whatever her contribution to the State may be.[63]

He also dealt with the persistent accusation by the anti-suffragists, including the future Liberal leader Asquith, that since the government of Great Britain and its Empire rested ultimately on physical force, women's constitutional weakness meant that they were not entitled to participate in 'the making of the laws, in the determining of policy, [and] in the supervision of national administration'. Balfour responded to this argument with the blunt assertion that '… the chief duty of the ordinary citizen consists not in shouldering a rifle and going off to the frontier; it consists in paying the bill'.[64]

In contrast to their political opponents, Liberal backbenchers sympathetic to the suffrage cause had no wish to get involved in discussing legislation that might result in the enfranchisement of almost a million propertied women just before a general election, although in the debate this fact was concealed by all kinds of other objections. In addition, Gladstone had sent an open letter to Samuel Smith MP opposing the bill in vehement terms, and the publication of this must have affected some Liberal votes.[65] Only Liberal suffragist William Woodall was prepared to openly declare that the raising of the question at that present moment was 'inopportune', and he accused the Conservatives of supporting the measure for 'tactical advantage' rather than believing 'in the justice of the claim'.[66]

Rollit's bill was defeated by 23 votes – 60.1% of Liberal votes were against the measure, one of the highest recorded on the Liberal side in a suffrage division, while 39.9% were for the bill. The percentage of Conservative and Liberal Unionist votes for the measure was 55%, with 45% against, which represented the beginning of a steady improvement, at

least until 1908, in what could now be called the Unionist suffragist vote.[67] However, these figures are deceptive, since as Martin Pugh has pointed out, '…these bills were not expected to become law and it must have been tempting to record a token vote for the women'.[68] Despite the defeat, Lady Knightley remained optimistic: '…we were only beaten by 23, which considering that Mr Gladstone wrote a pamphlet against us and that a tremendous whip was issued … was most satisfactory. The fact is that it is undoubtedly gaining ground in the country though not in society'.[69]

The Unionists narrowly lost the 1892 general election, and were out of office until 1895. Each year there were unsuccessful attempts to introduce a women's suffrage measure – one imaginative idea came from a group of suffragist MPs led by the Liberal Unionist Viscount Wolmer (soon to be Lord Selborne), who decided to put forward an amendment to the Registration of Electors Bill to allow for 'the registration of duly qualified women'.[70] This endeavour failed, but the suffrage societies found compensation in the fact that there were several gains for women during this period. They welcomed the news that women in New Zealand had secured the parliamentary vote in September 1893, and in March 1894 the field of municipal government was opened up to many more women when the Liberals brought in the Local Government Act. Further encouragement was given to suffragists, when, in the same year, the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations passed a resolution in favour of the enfranchisement of women at their annual conference in Newcastle. After making the point that some fellow Conservatives had felt that the resolution did not go far enough because it stipulated that only widows and unmarried women ratepayers should have a vote, George Renwick, the President of the Divisional Council of the Primrose League in Newcastle, made a speech in favour of the proposal.[71] A general election was about to take place, and Renwick clearly believed that a limited measure of female enfranchisement would bring his party valuable votes:

> Is it not a hard case indeed, when we see intelligent, educated women driving voters to the poll, very often not nearly so intelligent or so well educated in politics as themselves … the unfortunate lady who has perhaps driven the voter, has to stop outside & bear the hoots and jeers, in many cases, of the opponents … I sincerely trust that the representatives of the Conservative party will give it the attention and sympathy it deserves. Believe me when I tell you our party has nothing to fear from women voters. If women are anything women are Conservative …I conclude my remarks by asking you to give your

> hearty & earnest support to this resolution, & I trust it will not be long before the Unionist party is in a position to give it effect. (cheers).

In July 1895 a combined Conservative and Liberal Unionist government took office for the first time. They had been elected by a substantial majority, and Shannon has suggested that Salisbury must have begun to rethink some of his long-held political beliefs: 'It now appeared that there was not after all going to be a war of the classes … The mass of new voters introduced within the pale of the constitution in 1867 and 1884 had not been instrumental in bringing about social or national disintegration'.[72] Many of those Unionist MPs who supported women's suffrage in principle believed that it was no longer so important to enfranchise propertied women in order to bring additional support to the party, and Lord Salisbury was experiencing increasingly poor health and had no will to institute any new legislation. In spite of these contrary indications suffragists were optimistic when the last opportunity arose for a women's suffrage measure to be heard in the House of Commons before the end of the century.

In February 1897, Ferdinand Faithfull Begg introduced a bill which proposed for the enfranchisement of women householders, but avoided making an overt statement about the position of married women, because he claimed: 'The Bill was intended merely to establish the principle of the extension of the Parliamentary franchise'.[73] Faithfull Begg came from an Edinburgh clerical family, and was a stockbroker for over twenty years before he became the Conservative MP for Glasgow St. Rollox division in 1895. He brought his suffrage bill forward two years later, and retired from politics in 1900 after a very short political career. Faithfull Begg's aunt was Emily Faithfull, one of the original Langham Place Circle, a campaigner for the extension of employment opportunities for women, a member of the Primrose League and a suffragist. It is possible that he had been influenced by the views of his aunt, for one of the main planks of his submission was the progress that women had made in all spheres, especially in higher education and local government, but, as he observed during the debate, 'notwithstanding all this, they were debarred from assisting to decide by whom the laws under which they lived should be made'.[74]

Introducing his Bill, Faithfull Begg made the usual declaration that the issue of women's suffrage was not a party political one, yet he clearly recognised that, despite his efforts, it was probable that nothing would happen until one of the political parties introduced the measure into its

official programme. On this occasion those speaking in support of an extension to the franchise could have no reason to harbour any ulterior motive, and a handful of suffragists from both parties made serious speeches in support of the bill. A certain apathy was apparent when prominent Conservatives like Balfour, Rollit and George Wyndham who had spoken in favour of bills in the past made no contribution to the debate, although they did vote for the measure in the division. The Unionist *Times* reported the following day that many of the opponents of women's suffrage had shown 'irresponsible frivolity' in their discussion of what was a very serious issue. The paper summed up very succinctly many of the underlying fears that lay beneath the refusal by any political party to include female enfranchisement in their official policy:

> Working men do not vote solid as a class, but as a class they do all the same dominate modern legislation in an increasing degree. So will it be with women admitted to the franchise and worried into eagerness to use it. The legislation and the policy of the country cannot but become essentially feminine instead of essentially masculine…[75]

As on previous occasions the anti-suffragists used the argument of the threat to the Empire that they believed women would pose if they were given the parliamentary vote. Despite the fact that the 1894 Local Government Act had extended the voting rights of qualified women, the Liberal MP Sir William Harcourt argued that there was 'far less a conclusive argument in favour of female suffrage in Imperial matters'.[76] Many Unionist backbenchers agreed with Harcourt – after all, they prided themselves on being the party of Empire, and the idea that the mother country might be weakened by women having the vote was a matter of grave anxiety. *The Times* summed up their concern: 'We can only envy the complacent optimism of those who can contemplate without misgiving the fortunes of an Empire governed after the manner of women, when placed in sharp rivalry and competition with States wise enough to remain under masculine guidance'.[77] The debate about women, Empire, and the vote was to gain momentum during the early years of the new century, as suffragist women began to campaign for the vote as 'a national imperative and an imperial necessity'.[78]

A popular argument against granting women's suffrage was that 'there was no sufficient demand for the Franchise among women', and this was reiterated in the Faithfull Begg debate.[79] Only the previous year a petition entitled the 'Appeal from Women of all Parties and all Classes' had been organised by Millicent Fawcett and a committee of suffragists which

included Lady Knightley, and presented to Parliament in May 1896.[80] The petition, containing over 257,000 signatures, was put on display in Westminster Hall, where it attracted a great deal of attention. Despite this significant effort, active supporters of suffrage remained small in number as a proportion of the female population, and this meant that MPs did not feel obliged to take any notice of them. Faithfull Begg's bill was carried at its second reading by 228 votes to 157, a majority of 71 votes, but due to obstruction by the opponents of women's suffrage, it never reached the committee stage. The percentage of the Unionist vote in favour was 57.3%, while there were 42.7% against, but once again the MPs knew that the measure would never become law.[81] Despite Rollit and Faithfull Begg's efforts, which had achieved an improved Unionist vote in favour of the enfranchisement of women, most of their fellow backbenchers had no wish to encourage the suffragists. They did not support either Disraeli, Salisbury or Balfour in their somewhat lukewarm support for women's suffrage, and since it was ostensibly considered a matter for personal conscience rather than being part of any official party programme many Unionist MPs felt free to vote against any suffrage proposal, or change their minds on those occasions when they felt it to be politically expedient.

Writing in the *Primrose League Gazette* the following year (despite the League officially discouraging discussion on women's suffrage), Faithfull Begg indicated that there was a long struggle ahead for his fellow suffragists, and he offered them some advice:

> …workers in the cause of Woman's Suffrage must patiently wait, working meanwhile with what earnestness they can, never allowing any election contest to be fought without insisting upon an expression of opinion from the candidates and continuously working in the constituencies … In short, the real battle in all such cases nowadays is fought in the constituencies, not in Parliament; and this fact should be clearly recognized.[82]

Faithfull Begg's bill was the last to have a full debate in the House of Commons before 1904, when the Liberal Sir Charles McLaren's resolution obtained a majority of 114.[83] Although three resolutions in favour of women's suffrage were brought before the House of Commons in 1899 (proposed by Faithfull Begg and another Unionist, J. T. Firbank), 1900 and 1901, they were never heard.[84] Despite the outbreak of the South African War in 1899, suffragists continued to put pressure on MPs by sending petitions and deputations to the House of Commons. In March 1901 a

petition from 29,000 women from the Lancashire mills was given to a group MPs friendly to women's suffrage by a deputation of fifteen working women led by Esther Roper, an organiser for the NUWSS. Later that year Balfour was presented with a symbolic memorial signed by over 1,000 women who had played a significant part in the organised suffrage movement in the years since its foundation in 1866.[85] However, the years between 1899 and 1902 did see a reduction in the activities of the suffragists both inside and outside Parliament, while energies were diverted to the war effort at home and abroad.

The Conservative approach to women's role in local government

As women gained more voting rights in municipal government, and more came forward to stand for election to the various boards and local councils, anti-suffragist MPs became anxious that a clear line should be drawn beyond which further participation by women in the political process would not be allowed. An opportunity to draw this line came up in 1899, when Lord Salisbury's administration introduced the London Government Act. The legislation provided for the old administrative units known as vestries, which had been responsible for such matters as sanitation, sewage and lighting, to be replaced by 28 new metropolitan borough councils. A handful of women had been serving successfully on London vestries, including Beatrice Willoughby, a Conservative member who believed that a woman was 'as much a citizen as a man', but the new legislation did not give them the right to stand for election to the borough councils.[86] As has been shown in the previous chapter, during the early 1890s local elections began to be conducted along firmer party political lines, and this had resulted in women finding it increasingly difficult to be adopted as candidates.[87] This factor, together with the problem that the new councils were seen as being more complex and parliamentary in nature, meant that many Unionist backbenchers believed that it would be inappropriate for women to become councillors, although they would still be entitled to vote.

Although a clause was successfully inserted in the Bill to enable women to sit on the new councils by the House of Commons, it was defeated in the House of Lords, despite a stout defence of women's municipal work by Lord Salisbury, who strongly believed in the benefits that female 'humanitarianism' could bring to the sphere of municipal government. He ridiculed the 'thin end of the wedge' argument used by the opponents of the clause, and suggested that: 'If there are persons who really believe that, because you allow women to sit as members of these new bodies, you are therefore hastening the admission of them to the Parliamentary suffrage, I

can only say that that is a system of argument I am wholly unable to understand.[88] Salisbury defended attacks on his interpretation of Conservative constitutional principles when it came to the issue of the extension of women's involvement in local government, and his approach to the question emphasised the use of the best people to do the work. In line with his previous pronouncements on the value of women's political work, the Prime Minister viewed the presence of women in local government as a force for integrity and a means of reconciliation between the classes:

> What touch there is, what contact there is, between the working classes and the classes that are above them … passes almost entirely through the hands of women … They feel the terrible evils with which vast multitudes in this city are oppressed. They are moved to act in those matters less by motives of a secondary character and more by the highest philanthropy than the men by whose side they sit, and if you remove them from the council chamber you are taking away from that council one of the highest, one of the most constant, and one of the most reliable stimulants to a true, and honest, and unflagging administration of the law. [89]

However, the Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Halsbury, spoke for the many peers who believed that the admission of women to the new borough councils was a step too far, when he asked the question: 'Where is the line at which we are going to stop? … I think this is a most serious constitutional change, and my Conservatism undoubtedly does recognise the fact that the Constitution … is a Constitution with which it is extremely unwise to tamper…'[90] The House of Lords was more temperamentally inclined to oppose female enfranchisement than the Commons, and this was a constant though remote threat which added to the pressure on the suffrage societies to ask only for a limited measure of enfranchisement, rather than extend their demand to include married women.[91]

Although there had been a clear vote in the House of Commons in favour of the clause, the Unionist government did not try and reverse the decision made by the House of Lords to reject it. Many anti-suffragist MPs believed, with some justification, that suffragists were using their increasing role in local government as a way to gain the parliamentary vote, and *The Times* appeared to support this notion when an editorial claimed that the women were attempting to 'drive the political wedge, not to push the interests of poor people in sanitation'.[92] Those who were committed to women's

participation in local government were dismayed by the failure of the Unionist government to recognise the value of their work by extending it further, and in 1902 they were to experience another setback. The Unionist government, now under the leadership of Balfour after Salisbury's retirement in July, introduced a controversial Education Bill which abolished School Boards and placed education under the management of counties and county boroughs, thus depriving women of their thirty-year right to stand for election to the Boards. As a concession the new education committees were allowed to co-opt additional members if they chose to do so, but this was poor recompense for the loss of around 270 women who were elected members of School Boards.[93] The issue presented a problem for some Conservative women, but the vast majority of them put party first and were prepared to accept the loss of some political power because they approved of the new Education Act and its financial support for Church schools.[94]

These setbacks, together with the fact that women remained barred from sitting on county councils, led suffragists to speculate that there might be a conspiracy by the politicians to prevent them making any further progress in the field of politics, at either local or national level.[95] Lady Strachey, a prominent member of the Women's Local Government Society and a committed suffragist, was one of the few Conservative women who publicly criticised the government's legislation, delivering a number of speeches which defended the role of women in the local sphere and making a link between the lack of a parliamentary vote and the loss of political power:

> Does anyone suppose for a moment that if women had had votes to be reckoned with they would have been kept out of County Councils, dropped out of parish vestries without being admitted to Borough Councils, & dismissed from all control of public education after 30 years work of which no one has ventured to dispute the value?[96]

The Conservative view of women's suffrage at the end of the nineteenth century

The predominant tone of the late nineteenth-century parliamentary debates on female enfranchisement was anti-suffragist, despite the second reading majorities of 1870 and 1897. The main objections to giving women the parliamentary vote remained the same – the belief that imperial government was essentially a masculine undertaking, the possibility of a women's suffrage measure opening the door to universal suffrage and eventually female MPs, the temperamental unsuitability of women to exercise the franchise and their alleged lack of interest in doing so, and the

necessity for women to remain outside the political sphere in order to exercise an impartial and benign moral influence on their families and the nation as a whole. Many of these objections were shared by men on both sides of the House of Commons, but the majority of anti-suffragists were Conservative backbenchers.

The National Review provided a forum for the expression of anti-suffragism during the 1880s, and in a polemical article written in 1888, shortly after the National Union had voted to support female enfranchisement at their annual conference, Goldwin Smith, the controversial Liberal Unionist writer and academic, put forward his arguments against women's suffrage.[97] He pointed out that although most Conservatives had a temperamental dislike of reform, they had allowed a combination of ambition and political fatalism to persuade them to stand aside and allow the introduction of two disastrous extensions of the franchise, which would only be made worse if they were 'cajoled and betrayed' into voting for women's suffrage. He rejected the argument of some Conservative suffragists that women tended to be a force for moderation and therefore would vote for the Conservative Party, and alleged that, on the contrary, radical women were more politically active and likely to dominate any female electorate. In his article Goldwin Smith revealed some of the underlying anxieties that underpinned male opposition to women's suffrage, when he asserted that allowing women voting rights would lead to a damaging 'feminisation' of political life:

> By the extension of the franchise to women, and the admission of a tide of female weakness and emotion into the electorate, Government would be emasculated; and this, in face of a world which, instead of becoming more feminine, seems to be daily becoming more a world of Bismarcks … Government and law rest at bottom on force, and force is male.

Although women were now more involved in political life through their work in party organisations and local government, these developments had little effect on the belief of politicians that governing the country was essentially a male occupation. While there were some men who were supportive of women in public life and were prepared to concede that they had a contribution to make, others were increasingly determined to resist women's demands, which they believed might eventually threaten the exclusively male environment of the Houses of Parliament. John Tosh has argued that in the latter half of the nineteenth-century the main ways in

which masculinity was expressed in social terms was through the expression of authority and independence – in the household as a father, husband and family provider, and away from the home in the workplace and all-male clubs and associations.[98] The argument that they also expressed their masculinity through the exercise of the franchise may provide one of the reasons why the recognition of the status of some women as homeowners, providers and workers by granting them the parliamentary vote was seen as a threat to a crucial area of male hegemony – the government of the Empire.

It is much harder to analyse the motives that underpinned the suffragism of a relatively small group of Conservative MPs. Many of them must have privately thought that enfranchising women might prevent the introduction of adult suffrage and add to the Conservative vote, but they put forward a number of different arguments when they spoke in support of suffrage bills. Lord Salisbury, and his son and son-in-law, Lord Robert Cecil and the Earl of Selborne respectively, took a moral approach to the question. Salisbury's religion informed his whole life, and the notion that women could bring a disinterested moral integrity to the corrupting world of politics appealed to his higher instincts. He was content to allow women like his wife and daughters to have a say in who should represent them in Parliament because he trusted their judgment in such matters. Balfour's support for women's suffrage was more complex and ambivalent. As Claire Eustance has pointed out, in his speech in the debate on Rollit's Bill in 1892 he undermined his argument in favour of the measure by listing all the reasons against female enfranchisement and then denying that they were true.[99] He was to demonstrate this uncertain approach to the question again in a letter to Christabel Pankhurst in 1907, when, in what he termed an 'unsatisfactory profession of faith', he defended his reluctance to publicly pledge support for women's suffrage by making it clear that if the argument had been based on abstract rights only, then 'I should, of course, be a strong supporter of the movement', but justified his lack of enthusiasm by making the point that 'it is because I am not as yet at all convinced that … women as a class seriously desire the franchise'. He concluded with the observation that, 'I should myself prefer (being a Conservative!) that the constitutional question should be allowed to rest'.[100]

Salisbury, Balfour and their suffragist colleagues could find no logical reason why propertied women should not have a vote, and as long as the real political power resided in Parliament they found the idea of female enfranchisement relatively unthreatening – the problem was that such a controversial constitutional change was at odds with fundamental Conservative thinking, and would almost certainly lead to potentially

disastrous internal divisions within the party. Whether they were in or out of office the issue of women's suffrage was never so important to these leaders of the Conservative Party that they felt moved to take on their hostile backbenchers and challenge the male political culture of which they themselves were a part.

4

THE FORMATION OF THE CONSERVATIVE AND UNIONIST WOMEN'S FRANCHISE ASSOCIATION

There was a general feeling of insecurity among Unionists at the beginning of the new century. Apart from the military reversals of the South African War, and the admission that many British army recruits had been found to be physically unfit, there was continuing concern about the economic and social conditions of the poor, which had been exposed in the social surveys of Booth and Rowntree.[1] The expansion of trade union membership, the formation in 1900 of a successor to the ILP in the form of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), and the emergence of a 'New Liberalism' which was concerned to find new ways to address social problems, indicated a breaking down of the Unionist ascendancy which had been enjoyed during the last years of Lord Salisbury's rule.[2] When Balfour became Prime Minister on Salisbury's retirement in 1902, he presided over a series of unpopular measures that managed to unite a fragmented opposition. The trade unions were angered by the government's failure to reverse the Taff Vale judgment of 1901, which held them liable for damages resulting from strike action; the 1902 Education Act antagonised Liberal Nonconformists with its funding of Church schools by local taxation; the introduction of indentured Chinese labour into South Africa was to lead to accusations of slavery and exploitation from trade unions and Liberals alike; and the Licensing Act of 1904 outraged the Liberal temperance movement with its apparent protection of vested interests.[3] Many Unionists believed that the party needed 'a new strategy that would appeal to the mass electorate and stem the rise of Socialism', and it is in this context that numerous pressure groups

were formed to resist increasing 'challenges to Empire and property', and Joseph Chamberlain attempted to restore their credibility as 'the party of Empire' by launching the tariff reform campaign.[4]

The political concerns of Conservative women from 1902

As well as being involved in the Primrose League, Conservative women began to join single-issue groups with a predominantly Unionist membership like the Liberty and Property Defence League (1882), the imperialist Navy League (1895), Victoria League (1901) and National Service League (1902), and the Tariff Reform League (1903).[5] Alice Balfour, the sister of Arthur Balfour, Betty Balfour, the wife of Alice's brother, Gerald, Gwendolen Cecil and Maud, Countess of Selborne, two of Lord Salisbury's daughters, the Countess of Jersey, Lady Knightley, and Meresia Nevill, the daughter of the Conservative hostess, Lady Dorothy Nevill, were just some of the prominent Unionist women whose commitment to imperialism drove them to become members of the Victoria League – an organisation founded by two of their colleagues, Violet Cecil and Edith Lyttelton, who were inspired by Britain's involvement in the South African War with the idea of bringing together women who were 'in sympathy with Imperial objects and desire[d] a close union between the different parts of the Empire'.[6] For these upper-class women Britain's imperial responsibility represented a call to service, and those who joined organisations like the Victoria League considered it their duty to do what they could to promote and secure the Empire by sponsoring educational work both at home and overseas, and encouraging the emigration of educated single women in order to populate and 'civilise' the colonies.

One of the other ways in which Unionist women could show their commitment to the Empire was by supporting tariff reform – a policy that had been proposed by the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, in a number of speeches made between 1902 and 1903. The Tariff Reform League (TRL), set up after Chamberlain's keynote speech in Birmingham on 15 May 1903, attracted considerable support from Unionist women.[7] The campaign for protectionist tariffs which would favour food imports from the Empire in return for a preferential market for British manufacturing exports was becoming increasingly attractive to many in the Unionist Party. Advocates of the policy hoped that the tariffs raised would help to pay for necessary social reforms without the need for additional taxation, thus providing a Conservative answer to the redistributive policies of the Liberals, and they also believed that it would strengthen and unify the Empire.

While the Primrose League declined to take an official position on more controversial questions, groups like the Tariff Reform League provided Conservative women with a more overtly political setting where these questions could be discussed, and membership of the Women's Commmittee of the TRL (established in February 1904) grew rapidly during the early years of the new century. In 1906 Liberal Unionist women linked up with the Women's Committee to form the Women's Unionist and Tariff Reform Association (WUTRA), and by 1909 the increasingly popular Women's Unionist Associations had joined the new grouping, which became known as the Women's Amalgamated Unionist and Tariff Reform Association (WAUTRA). It was this organisation that was the forerunner of the official women's arm of the Conservative Party after World War I.

As Unionist women expanded their political involvement and extended their influence over political debate, membership of these organisations continued to increase, while at the same time the Primrose League experienced a slow decline, although a number of prominent Unionist women continued to play a part in the League's activities.[8] The rivalry between these different political groups was a much-discussed topic in letters to the *Primrose League Gazette*, and this complaint, written by Constance Davenport in 1904, revealed the increasing popularity of sectional politics among Unionist women:

> I notice that Women's Tariff Reform Leagues are being started in some parts of the country. I cannot help feeling that there may be some danger in this new movement – the danger of encouraging feeling to run so high on this burning question (either for or against Tariff Reform) that members may become alienated from their habitations … I would earnestly beg members to help the Primrose League to carry out their policy of looking at the matter in a large-minded way, allowing to individuals … their own opinions, but not endeavouring to force the Primrose League as a body to take one side or the other in the matter…[9]

By 1907 the same kind of criticism was being made of the increasing number of Women's Unionist Associations. One Conservative agent wrote that although he had 'no possible grievance' against these organisations he believed that the Primrose League could carry out the work of political education quite adequately, and that the Women's Unionist Associations were 'superfluous'. He ended with an appeal to PLG readers 'to refrain from

encouraging the almost monthly growth of new political organisations when the old ones are still working faithfully and efficiently…'[10]

The Primrose League had always emphasised the fact that men and women worked together in the organisation, thus preventing potential discord between the sexes, but the new associations were sexually segregated and this made some Unionists uncomfortable. The Women's Liberal Federation had a record of dispute with the Liberal leadership over the question of women's suffrage, and the party was anxious that this kind of conflict should not happen with the Conservative women. However, appeals for loyalty to the Primrose League went largely ignored, and the women's organisations continued to grow – by 1904 there was already concern that the Women's Unionist Associations were drawing off League members in Scotland, and also in the Midlands, Surrey, Lancashire and Yorkshire'.[11]

Despite these new opportunities for Conservative women to express their political views, the question of women's suffrage remained undiscussed, both in the Primrose League and the Women's Unionist and Tariff Reform Associations.[12] Many of those who supported female enfranchisement complained that some branches of these organisations had put great pressure on them not to take up such a controversial cause.[13] The frustration caused by this refusal to address the issue was to lead to the resignation of Lady Strachey from her local WAUTRA:

> I have not withdrawn from the W.U. & T.R. Association without serious consideration … I consider it worse than futile to support with our time, our energy and our money those who, while accepting these to the full, deny us direct political power on the plea that women are not capable of forming a reasonable judgment on political matters … As far as they are concerned they cannot complain if we relieve them & the country from the disadvantage of our unreasonable & effective interference in these matters … I much regret that, as a Society of Women whose whole purpose & function is political, the W.U. & T.R. Assn. does not accept the logic of its position, & make Women's Suffrage a plank in its programme, as has been done by the Women's Liberal Federation.[14]

The reply from the secretary, Miss Graham Hope, emphasised the fact that WAUTRA was 'strictly neutral' on the suffrage question, but she added, 'we are working for the return of Mr Balfour, who is distinctly in favour of your cause'. For Jane Strachey and her fellow suffragists this kind

of placatory answer was not enough, for they believed it was time that the issue of women's suffrage was placed more formally on the political agenda of the Unionist Party. Lady Strachey had always maintained that Conservatives had nothing to fear from a limited women's franchise, on the contrary, they would benefit from it: '…it is a development consistent with the whole course of our constitutional history. Moreover it will in the opinion of many be disastrous for the Conservative party if it does not … take it in hand'. She believed that the only way to address women's grievances was through the 'acquisition of voting power', and the party who took the step of including women in the franchise would 'earn the gratitude of the future of a large class of voters who will not forget to whom they owe their political enfranchisement…'[15]

Because of the constraints placed on them by the party hierarchy Conservative women who wished to campaign for female enfranchisement had little option but to join a branch of one of the existing suffrage societies. This would almost certainly be either the predominantly Liberal National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), or the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), which from its establishment in 1903 had been linked to the Labour Party until its founders, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, severed the connection in 1907. A number of Conservative suffragists, including such prominent figures as Emily Davies, Lady Knightley and Lady Strachey, all of whom had supported the enfranchisement of women since the days of the 1867 Reform Bill, were actively involved in the NUWSS, while a few others, like Lady Constance Lytton, became members of the WSPU. Lady Strachey was elected to the Executive Committee of the NUWSS in 1907 (the only Conservative among the twenty members), and on 9 February of that year, with Millicent Fawcett and Lady Frances Balfour, she led between two to three thousand women through the rain-soaked streets of London in what became known as the 'Mud March' – the first major outdoor demonstration organised by the women's suffrage movement.[16] Strachey also served as president of her local South Paddington branch of the London Society for Women's Suffrage (LSWS), an organisation which she had joined in 1901 when it was called the Central Society for Women's Suffrage. The LSWS, which operated under the umbrella of the NUWSS and prided itself on its independent stance, was popular with aristocratic suffragists based in London during the Season, and among its Conservative vice-presidents were Lady Edward Spencer Churchill, Lady Knightley, the Countess of Meath, the Countess of Selborne, and Mrs Henry Sidgwick. The veteran suffragists Emily Davies and Louisa Twining were also members of the LSWS, the former being on

the Executive Committee and the latter a vice-president until her death in 1912 at the age of 91.[17] However, the great majority of Conservative women who were involved in political life remained either members of the Primrose League or joined the new Women's Unionist and Tariff Reform Associations, and both organisations continued to refuse to become involved in the debate on women's suffrage.

New developments in the women's suffrage movement in 1908

On 28 February 1908 suffragists were encouraged by the fact that a women's suffrage bill introduced by Henry York Stanger, a Liberal MP, passed its second reading by 179 votes, although only 34 Unionists voted for the measure.[18] The following day even the staunchly Unionist and anti-suffrage *Morning Post* was forced to admit that women's suffrage was like 'a tide which has been steadily rising for thirty years: which, beyond doubt, will some time rise high enough to overcome all obstacles'[19] There had been either a bill or a resolution proposing female enfranchisement every year since Sir Charles McLaren's successful resolution in 1904, but they had made no progress.[20] This was the first successful vote on a bill since 1897, although it was blocked at the committee stage.

By this time the Liberal Party had been in power for two years, but despite the fact that they were considered to be the party of electoral reform, and many of their MPs had been longstanding supporters of women's suffrage, they had not placed the issue on their legislative programme. However, after a temporary loss of faith in the idea of extending the franchise further, Liberals were reconsidering the idea of enlarging the working-class electorate. This was borne out by the fact that shortly after the Stanger vote, Asquith, the Liberal Prime Minister and an anti-suffragist, met a delegation of suffragist MPs and suggested to them that a democratic women's suffrage amendment might be tacked on to a future adult male suffrage measure.[21] This announcement caused consternation throughout the Unionist Party, particularly among those who supported the limited enfranchisement of women as a way of countering the threat of adult suffrage. Conservative suffragists agreed with Millicent Fawcett of the NUWSS when she expressed her dismay that Asquith had promised the men more franchise reform while leaving women to the mercies of an amendment which he would not personally support.[22]

In the summer of 1908 there were two widely publicized and well-attended demonstrations in London organised by the NUWSS and the WSPU.[23] The NUWSS organised a procession from the Embankment to the Albert Hall on 13 June, which approximately 10,000 women attended,

including a group who carried a Conservative banner and were led by Mrs Emma Boulnois, the wife of a member of the Local Government Board. Mrs Boulnois had been speaking at a number of Unionist gatherings on the question of women's suffrage, and it was as a result of a suggestion from Millicent Fawcett that she had raised the subscriptions to pay for the banner. This was probably the first time that Conservative women had taken part in a large-scale suffrage event as self-styled representatives of their political party, and it must have been difficult for them to demonstrate their allegiance to the cause in such a public arena.[24]

It was estimated that about 30,000 women marched in the WSPU procession of 21 June, and at the end of the demonstration a resolution was taken to Asquith asking him to 'grant votes to women without delay'.[25] The Prime Minister's reply, received two days later, merely reaffirmed the pledge he had made in May – Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, the WSPU's treasurer, wrote that she believed that they 'had touched the limit of public demonstration … Nothing but militant action is left to us now'.[26] It was not surprising, therefore, that the suffragettes began to step up their militant campaign – the first act of stone-throwing by members of the WSPU took place on 30 June, when the windows of No. 10, Downing Street were broken by Edith New and Mary Leigh. There was also an increase in the heckling of speeches given by Liberal ministers, including Asquith himself, while Lloyd George and Herbert Gladstone, who were both thought to favour women's suffrage, were particularly targeted by the suffragettes. On 13 October, when Parliament reassembled for the new session, the WSPU 'rushed' the House of Commons in an attempt to confront the Prime Minister, and thirty-seven demonstrators were arrested by the police. The increasing militancy was beginning to disturb MPs as well as the general public, and this became the cause of mounting concern to constitutional suffragists and anti-suffragists alike.

These dramatic events, together with Asquith's announcement on adult suffrage, may have provided the catalyst which led to the establishment three new campaigning organisations during 1908. On 21 July the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League was founded, chaired by Lady Jersey, a prominent leader of both the Primrose League and the Victoria League, followed in December by the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage, led by the former imperial pro-consul, Lord Cromer, and supported by a number of other Unionist peers and politicians. By December 1910 the two groups had merged into one organisation – the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage (NLOWS). The third organisation to be formed that year was the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA).

The reasons for the formation of the Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Association

Although by the end of 1908 there was growing concern about the increased militancy of the WSPU on the part of the constitutional suffrage societies, for most of that year Conservative suffragists remained relatively sympathetic to their campaign. The previous year Lady Strachey had admitted that 'the action of "the Suffragettes" came upon us all as a great surprise, & was at first universally condemned by those have been using constitutional methods only, with poor results, for half a century…', but she could not deny that 'the country has been roused to interest as it never was before … those of us who cannot commend the actions of the "Suffragettes" & will not imitate them, feel we must at least keep silence, and reserve our polemics for our enemies'[27] On 19 March 1908 her fellow suffragist Lady Knightley attended a great fund-raising rally for the WSPU in the Albert Hall, where she was deeply impressed by Mrs Pankhurst's speech, and the amount of money raised for the suffrage cause. 'No one can say that women do not care after that', she commented afterwards in her diary. She also attended the rally in Hyde Park which ended the WSPU demonstration on 21 June and was equally enthusiastic – 'It was a wonderful sight, there were 20 platforms … there had been 7 processions converging from all parts of London…'[28] Writing for *The Queen* two months later Lady Knightley agreed with Lady Strachey's sentiments and concluded:

> For the first time in the forty-two years which have elapsed since Mr John Stuart Mill presented the first petition to Parliament the question of women's suffrage is really before the country, really a question of "practical politics." And, however much one may disapprove – and I for one do disapprove most heartily – of some of the methods adopted by the "suffragettes," it is impossible to deny that this advance is due in great measure to their pluck and determination.[29]

These observations help to show that although the militant behaviour of the suffragettes did cause some alarm among constitutional suffragists it was probably not the main reason that Conservative women decided to start their own suffrage association.[30]

The NUWSS's decision to maintain their links with the Liberal Party meant that many Conservative suffragists felt that that they were placed in an untenable position in the light of Asquith's pronouncements about adult suffrage. A sign of this dissatisfaction with the Liberal/suffrage connection was evident among some Unionist members of the constitutional suffrage

societies. When Lady Strachey was asked to address the first public meeting of the Brighton and Hove Women's Franchise Society in September 1908, the letter of invitation spelt out the dilemma. In six months the society had grown from 30 to 270 members, with '…a large proportion of Conservatives among its members, and we feel it to be of special importance that this meeting should be addressed by at least one speaker who is not a supporter of the present government'.[31] Lady Knightley would have agreed with these sentiments entirely, since she disliked the public perception of women's suffrage as being part of the radical politics of the Liberal Party. When she was invited to become involved in the formation of a new Conservative suffrage society in July 1908 she consented to the proposal because she believed that the time was right for Conservative women 'to show that it is not only Radical women who want the suffrage'.[32] Lady Knightley expanded on her views when she wrote the following month:

> Hitherto the various suffrage societies have been supposed to be more or less … non-party … Not, however, perhaps unnaturally, the Liberal element had predominated, and … there can be no doubt that the most active and pertinacious of the agitators are to be found in the Liberal ranks … It is therefore of the utmost importance that Conservative and Unionist women suffragists of all classes should organise, and that promptly, on party lines.[33]

It was important for Conservative suffragists to feel that the promotion of a strictly limited women's franchise could be satisfactorily linked to the political principles that they supported, and that such legislation would be of benefit to the Unionist Party.

Unionist fears of the threat posed by the possible introduction of adult suffrage should not be underestimated. Seasoned campaigners for women's political rights like Emily Davies and Lady Strachey would continue to argue that women's suffrage would allow women to assume the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, which they had earned through their beneficial participation in public life, and that it would enable them to obtain 'legislative remedies for grievances which are universally admitted to require remedy…'[34] But even Emily Davies, who had never had any desire to become embroiled in party politics, was drawn in to the adult suffrage debate through her correspondence with fellow suffragists at the time of the Dickinson suffrage bill in 1907.[35] As a cautious Conservative Davies believed that any suffrage bill should give votes 'to women ratepayers only', but as a member of the LSWS

she was willing to support the idea of a bill which simply asked for the vote to be granted to women on the same terms 'as it is or may be granted to men'. In her letter to Rosalind Nash she appeared to be unaware of the formation of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage earlier that year:

> It is said that the granting of the suffrage to Women ratepayers is a concession that would be acceptable to men, who will go no further, and it has lately been suggested that a new league or society should be formed, especially for the purpose of securing their help. This is not likely to be done, but I think it is clear that the "is or may be" is a middle course, which divides us least … In departing from this and bringing in the question of Adult Suffrage, we arrive on quite different ground. It ceases to be a Women's question and becomes what may be called , for want of a better name, a Labour question.[36]

Davies's view that the best compromise was to ask for the vote for women on the same terms as men was shared by most constitutional suffragists, but for Conservative suffragists the important thing was to make sure that it was their party that adopted the measure as part of its political programme. This would ensure that the electorate had the choice of rejecting the adult suffrage proposals of the Liberals knowing that the Unionists offered a moderate and acceptable alternative. One Conservative suffragist summed up the situation:

> We must press home to the leaders of our party the undoubted fact … that the best way to defeat Adult Suffrage is to give that limited measure of enfranchisement to duly-qualified women for which all the Suffrage Societies are unanimously asking, – a measure which would only enfranchise one million and a quarter women, instead of suddenly and unprecedently placing an untried body of electors in a majority. They will, moreover, have to fight the only other possible alternative to our demand; namely, Male Adult Suffrage; the advent of which would very possibly bring civil war in its train … The Conservative Party must not be allowed to go to sleep over the question of Women's Suffrage. It is a question that will have to considered, and at no distant date.[37]

The use of such strong language revealed the extent of the Conservative apprehension at the idea of any further expansion of the male electorate – there was a fear of political polarisation which, as David Jarvis has recognised in his analysis, 'was only partially offset by the hope some Conservatives invested in the female franchise and in the continuing success of popular

Toryism'.[38] In this context Conservative women suffragists saw themselves coming to the rescue of a beleaguered party – they could be relied on to bear the duties of responsible citizenship, while other "untried" electors might be tempted by the false promises of socialism. '…the triumph of Socialism is impossible without the previous adoption of adult suffrage', wrote a prominent Conservative, 'and … the greatest safeguard against adult suffrage would be the bestowal of the franchise upon women'.[39]

The need to resist adult suffrage was not the only spur to the formation of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association. Louisa Knightley was one of those who realised that it was necessary to address the threat that the new Women's National Anti-Suffrage League posed to the suffrage cause. She wrote in her diary on 20 July that '…The real, serious opposition is only now beginning', and the formation of the Men's League a few months later was to her 'a formidable blow'.[40] The membership of the anti-suffrage movement was predominantly Conservative, and dominated by respected leaders of the Primrose League like Lady Desart, Lady Ilchester and Lady Jersey, imperial administrators like Lord Curzon and Lord Cromer, and MPs such as Austen Chamberlain and Sir Edward Clarke. Lady Knightley was publicly disparaging about some of the female aristocrats who led the anti-suffrage campaign, writing that they were 'women in Society with a big "S" … women with their feet in the fender, who do not realise how the possession of the suffrage would strengthen the position of the women who possibly have no fender to put them in…', but she had to admit that they could also 'bring great influence to bear … and have the ear of the governing class'.[41] The fact that such prominent figures had decided to argue the anti-suffrage position on the national stage was a vital factor in the decision of Conservative suffragists to adopt a much higher political profile than they had before.

One of the ways to fight the anti-suffrage accusation that Conservative suffragists were bringing their party into disrepute was to take on their arguments and refute them, and the CUWFA was formed with the idea of mounting a campaign to counter such propaganda.[42] There was a particular need to address those anti-suffrage arguments that took two of the most important tenets of Conservatism – the preservation of the Empire and the maintenance of the Constitution – and claimed that women were unfitted to exercise political power where imperial matters were concerned, and that the enfranchisement of women, however limited, would inevitably lead to adult suffrage. The argument over whether or not women's suffrage would be good or bad for the Empire was one of the main areas of difference between the two groups, and was to play a large part in the campaign

launched by the CUWFA. Conservative suffragists believed it was time to challenge the anti-suffrage argument that women were not politically educated enough to cast a vote to elect an Imperial Parliament, and convince the waverers in the party that women's enfranchisement would bring benefits to the Empire, rather than undermine it. The importance of women's imperial work had to be translated into an argument for the vote, and it is no coincidence that the CUWFA was to have among its founding members a number of women who were members of imperialist associations.

The founders of the Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Association

The idea of a Conservative suffrage society had first been suggested by a Miss Hutchinson Wright in a letter to *Women's Franchise* early in 1908. A number of women responded to her call, including Amelia Gurney, Harriet Packer, Eveline Mitford (who later became the editor of the CUWFA journal), and Sophy Edmonds (the future CUWFA treasurer). These women, together with Mrs Emma Boulnois, who had separately identified a need for a distinctive party-based campaign for women's suffrage, decided to set up what became known as the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, to be based in London. Lady Knightley agreed to be the organisation's president in July 1908, but it was not until November that the CUWFA was officially launched.[43]

On November 6th, 1908, an informal meeting of those interested in becoming involved in the new organisation was held in London, under the chairmanship of Lady Knightley. She recorded in her journal that 'a great many people complained of being bullied by the Conservative Associations and Primrose League Habitations because they supported women's suffrage. We have not won the battle yet'.[44] The formation of the CUWFA was announced in the newspapers a few days later, together with a list of names of fourteen prominent women who had consented to be vice-presidents, thus guaranteeing, the announcement claimed, that the women's suffrage question would be judged 'from a political and academic as well as from a woman's point of view'.[45] Among the names quoted were the sisters and sister-in-law of Arthur Balfour, the Conservative leader, Alice Balfour, Lady Rayleigh and Lady Betty Balfour respectively, together with such prominent Conservative women as Lady Robert Cecil (who was married to Lord Salisbury's third son), Lady Edward Spencer Churchill, Lady Lockyer, the Countess of Meath, Viscountess Midleton and Lady Strachey. Distinguished names from the world of education and philanthropy were

Miss E. Constance Jones, Mistress of Girton College, Miss Margaret Tuke, Principal of Bedford College, and Louisa Twining.

A number of these women had a long and consistent record of support for women's enfranchisement at national and local level – among those who had signed the pro-suffrage response to the famous appeal against women's suffrage published in the *Nineteenth Century* in June 1889 were Alice Balfour, Lady Knightley, the Countess of Meath, Lady Rayleigh, and Louisa Twining. Many of the same names could be found on the membership list of the London Society for Women's Suffrage. Constance Jones already belonged to the Cambridge University branch of the NUWSS, while Lady Lockyer, the Countess of Meath, Lady Strachey, and Louisa Twining were active members of the Women's Local Government Society, which had won a notable victory the previous year, when, under the 1907 County and Borough Councils Act, women could no longer be disqualified by sex or marriage for election as a councillor or alderman of a county council or borough (including metropolitan borough) council.[46] The acquisition of women with a collective record of commitment to the expansion of women's political and social rights, and with the necessary social standing within Unionist circles, was a coup for the new organisation. It was not surprising that Lady Knightley recorded in her journal – 'We start with an excellent list of Vice Presidents…[47]

Women like Lady Knightley, Lady Strachey and Lady Rayleigh were now in their sixties, but a new generation of Conservative women who had been very young when the Primrose League was formed took their participation in the League, the Women's Unionist Associations and local government for granted, and had confidence in their ability to contribute to the national political debate on behalf of themselves and their party. Lady Betty Balfour and Lady Robert Cecil were just two of the women from this new generation, born in the 1860s and from the same Conservative aristocratic family networks whose female members had always taken a close interest in political affairs – the Balfours, the Cecils and the Lyttons being the most prominent in this respect.[48]

Several of Lord Salisbury's children, together with their respective spouses, were actively involved in the women's suffrage movement during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Advocates of the suffrage cause included his eldest daughter, Maud Cecil, Countess of Selborne, and her husband; his third son, Lord Robert Cecil, and his wife, Eleanor; and his youngest son, Hugh Cecil – although the latter confined his support to speeches in the House of Commons. The Cecils were linked to the Balfours by the marriage of Lord Salisbury's elder sister Blanche to James Maitland

Balfour. They were the parents of Arthur Balfour, Salisbury's successor as Conservative Prime Minister, and now the Leader of the Opposition. All Arthur's sisters and sisters-in-law were active suffragists. His eldest sister, Eleanor, was married to Henry Sidgwick, the founder of Newnham College, and his second sister, Evelyn, was the wife of the eminent scientist, businessman and landowner, Lord Rayleigh. His younger brothers Gerald and Eustace, were married to Lady Betty Lytton (sister of Constance and Victor, Earl of Lytton), and Lady Frances Campbell, respectively. His sister Alice remained unmarried, and spent much of her life looking after her brother. It could be said that these women constituted a female 'Hotel Cecil' – the equivalent of the circle of male family connections that seemed to link many of those who held office in the governments of Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour.[49]

The list of the first vice-presidents of the CUWFA was notable for the number of committed imperialists it contained. Viscountess Midleton's husband had served under Curzon as Secretary of State for India, while the Countess of Meath and her husband were dedicated imperialists and proponents of national efficiency, and were involved in a variety of patriotic and philanthropic schemes, including the founding of Empire Day.[50] Alice Balfour and Lady Betty Balfour and Lady Knightley were all members of the Victoria League, the last being president of the British Women's Emigration Association (BWEA) and editor of the *Imperial Colonist*.[51] It was clear from the beginning that the CUWFA was in an excellent position to put forward the case for women's enfranchisement being a positive force for good within the British Empire. The women's suffrage debate had a strong imperial component, as has been previously stated, and the CUWFA intended to devote considerable effort to publicising the advantages that the measure had already brought to Australia and New Zealand.[52] Unionist suffragists believed that the vote was needed as an aid to organised imperialism, both as a means to promote women-centred legislation which would benefit those under colonial rule, and as a way of establishing British women's place in the hierarchy of imperial citizenship. (There is a more detailed discussion of the CUWFA's argument for women's suffrage based on its value to the Empire in the following chapter).

The first year of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association

The announcement of the formation of the CUWFA in *The Times* outlined the methods the members intended to use to promote the cause of women's suffrage:

> They will work on constitutional lines and will organise meetings and give lectures, by means of which they hope to convince and educate, without attempting to use coercive methods of any kind. Leaflets and pamphlets on the subject will be circulated and every effort made to have a large and representative body of Conservatives and Unionists pledged to assist their leaders, and to influence the Conservative party to extend the franchise to duly-qualified women.[53]

This statement was formalised when, the following year, the journal of the new organisation, *The Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, began publication.[54] Every issue of the *Review* began with the objects of the Association, which were listed as follows:

1. To form a bond of union between all Conservatives and Unionists who are in favour of the removal of the sex disqualification and the extension of the Franchise to all duly-qualified women. [By this they meant being a property owner or ratepayer].
2. To convince members of the Conservative and Unionist Party of the desirability of this policy, and as far as is possible to give active support to official candidates at elections when they are in favour of the Enfranchisement of Women. (This Association, though pledging itself not to oppose any official Unionist candidate, yet will not work as an Association for any Candidate who is opposed to Women's franchise).
3. To work for Women's Enfranchisement by Educative and Constitutional methods consistent with Unionist principles.
4. To hold meetings and arrange for lectures in furtherance of the above aims, and to provide literature on the subject.
5. To maintain the principles of the Conservative and Unionist party with regard to the basis on which the Franchise should rest and to oppose Universal Suffrage in any form.[55]

From the beginning the CUWFA made it clear to its members that they were 'a party organization, carrying out party principles … The Association stood for Conservatism and Imperialism. It differed from other societies in that … it sought to advance the Cause among Conservatives and Unionists only'.[56] The CUWFA was not unique in its link to a political party – in October 1908 a small group of Liberal women who were frustrated at Asquith's refusal to introduce a women's suffrage measure founded the Forward Suffrage Union, which elected to stay within the WLF.[57] The

CUWFA was unique in that it was not a protest group within the Primrose League or the Women's Unionist Associations – the founders had no intention of causing conflict within the Unionist Party. A separate organisation with a declared commitment to Conservative ideals and led by women of impeccable social and political credentials was seen as the best way to exert pressure on Unionist politicians, and it was significant that the founders incorporated the name of their political party into the official title of the new organisation. The pledge of the CUWFA not to work for any Unionist parliamentary candidate who was against women's suffrage was a controversial and potentially divisive move, but they knew that this declaration would not prevent the Primrose League and the Women's Unionist Associations campaigning on behalf of such a candidate.

Lady Strachey, one of the new vice-presidents, was one of those who welcomed the new group with enthusiasm: 'The formation of a Conservative & Unionist Women's Association to further the cause of Women's franchise is one of the most encouraging signs that the time is ripe for this great & just reform'.[58] Further encouragement came when the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations held their annual conference in Cardiff, and passed yet another resolution in favour of granting the parliamentary franchise to those women who already possessed the right to vote at municipal elections.[59] These gestures of support were in contrast to the disapproving article written by Lady Lovat, who, in anticipation of the formation of the CUWFA, employed the same phrase that had been used to describe Disraeli's Reform Act when she warned that the Unionist Party 'should hesitate before it breaks with all its traditions in favour of a leap in the dark such as the one at present in contemplation'.[60] Another opponent was the anti-suffragist Edith Milner, the respected Ruling Councillor of the Milner Habitation in York. She wrote to *The Times* to express her strong reservations about the party political nature of the new association: '…I see to my great regret that the Conservative women have started a suffrage league. Women … like myself have long grasped the fact that this should not be a political but a national question…', and she went on to warn that 'the whole government of the British Empire is threatened with such a drastic change, should the franchise to women be granted, that it is not possible to foresee what the result would be'.[61] Milner's practical response to the founding of the CUWFA was to start a branch of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League in York.[62]

The President of the CUWFA, Lady Knightley, recorded the regular meetings of the Executive Committee in her Journal, and on December 5th 1908, she observed that those who had joined "seem a sensible lot, and we

are enrolling members at the rate of 100 a week. But there is a long fight before us."[63] The new organisation took offices in Dover Street, Piccadilly, and clerical staff were employed to help with the enquiries about membership that began to pour in. It is impossible to tell how many joined the CUWFA since no precise figures were published, but in March 1909 the suffrage periodical *Women's Franchise* reported that there were over 900 members, and by July over 1500 had joined.[64] By the end of the first year ten groups were reporting their activities to the *Review* – three of these were London groups in the wealthy districts of Belgravia and Chelsea, Kensington, and Marylebone and Paddington, while the rest were in the cities of Bath, Bristol, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hull and Liverpool.[65]

Because of the paucity of documentation it is difficult to know who was on the Executive Committee of the CUWFA during the first year, but it is likely that the founders of the organisation were the officers and committee members. Emma Boulnois was the first chairman of the CUWFA, while Sophy Edmonds became the Hon. Treasurer, Louise Gilbert Samuel the Hon. Secretary, and Amelia Gurney, Eveline Mitford and Harriet Packer sat on the committee. In March 1909 *Women's Franchise* reported five new members had joined them – Lady Betty Balfour, Lady Castlereagh, Viscountess Midleton, Mrs Arthur Packenham and Lady Willoughby de Eresby. At the same time the number of vice-presidents increased – prominent names included the Countess of Fingall, the Countess of Huntingdon, Viscountess Dillon, Mrs Leopold de Rothschild, and the pioneer doctor Sophia Jex Blake – and by the end of the year a large Women's Council had been formed.[66]

The first major public meeting organised by the CUWFA was held in London on 9 December 1908. Lord Robert Cecil gave the first of many speeches in which he urged the Unionists to take a clear position on the women's suffrage question, but at the same time he reiterated the party's approach to voting qualifications – 'Conservative policy had been not to resist all extensions of the franchise, but to resist its extension to classes who were less able by education and by their stake in the country to take a share in the government'. He concluded that Unionists had always been 'against the vertical but in favour of the lateral extension'.[67] These sentiments were to be repeated by the leaders of the CUWFA at public meetings up and down the country during the following months, and they were particularly important in the light of the Liberal MP Geoffrey Howard's Adult Suffrage Bill which received its second reading on 19 March 1909. The bill was carried in the House of Commons by a majority of 35 votes, a vast reduction on the majority of 179 votes for the Stanger's women's suffrage

bill the previous year, and all but one of the Unionist MPs present for the division voted against the proposal.[68] The bill made no further progress, but the CUWFA would continue to feel the need to emphasise the point that a limited women's franchise would in no way contradict fundamental Conservative beliefs about parliamentary representation.

During 1909 the CUWFA held a succession of public meetings, 'at homes', receptions, and drawing-room meetings in London and the provinces, which were designed to promote the suffrage cause, attract more members, and encourage the setting up of new branches. By the first Annual Meeting, held on 9 November 1909, the Executive Committee felt able to congratulate themselves on the work achieved so far. Not only had there been a healthy growth in membership, but the growing support of Conservative men had led to the establishment of a list of Honorary Vice-Presidents for male supporters only. Among those on the first published list of eighteen members were the Earl of Lytton, Lord Willoughby de Eresby, the young journalist and future author John Buchan, and three MPs – Sir William Bull, John Harmood-Banner, and Samuel Roberts. In late November, the most hard-working members of the Executive Committee, Lady Betty Balfour and Mrs Emma Boulnois, embarked on the first of many winter speaking tours, holding meetings in York, Hull, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling, Bridge-of-Allan, Kilmarnock, and Liverpool, with Lady Balfour going on to Dublin, to hold a joint meeting with Lady Arnott, the president of the Irish branch of the CUWFA.[69]

In addition to these activities the CUWFA undertook an educational programme which started with the publication of a series of pamphlets setting out their arguments in favour of women's suffrage. The titles spoke for themselves – 'Why Conservative and Unionist Women want the Vote', 'Conservative Leaders' Opinions on the Enfranchisement of Women', 'An Appeal to Conservative and Unionist Women' by Lady Knightley of Fawsley, 'A Reply to the Anti-Suffragists', and 'Women's Suffrage, a Corollary to Conservatism'. The CUWFA also organised a weekly series of lectures in London, beginning in June 1909, which were designed to educate and inform Unionist women about the importance of their role in public life, and dealt with a range of subjects from 'Women's Influence on Poor Law Administration' to 'Women and Imperial Defence'. Badges were produced in blue and white enamel with gold lettering, and sold for a shilling with the boast that they were 'made in England by English workmen' – a reference to the popularity of tariff reform within the Unionist Party at that time, and a clear assertion of the patriotism of Conservative suffragists.[70]

The newly-formed CUWFA were able to take advantage of the presence of many suffragists from other countries who were in London in April 1909 to attend the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) Congress. The prominent German suffragist Anita Augspurg and the Swedish campaigner Anna Kleman spoke to a packed meeting organised by the Kensington Branch, and chaired by Lady Willoughby de Eresby.[71] Marion Chadwick, a member of the Executive Committee, was sent as the CUWFA representive to the Congress, where she proclaimed herself 'a staunch Conservative and an Imperialist, yet withal, a staunch Suffragist'.[72] It was the first time that Conservative suffragists had attempted to forge official links with suffragists from overseas, and the move represented a serious attempt to move beyond the boundary of national politics into a larger grouping which consisted of suffrage organisations that did not necessarily approach the question of women's enfranchisement from either a British or a Conservative standpoint. The Ladies' Grand Council of the Primrose League had always rejected links with women's organisations, fearing the accusation that they might 'sink their party for the sake of their sex', so the willingness of the CUWFA to move towards active co-operation with other suffrage organisations both at home and abroad was a break with traditional party attitudes towards the role of women.[73] In reality the IWSA had a predominantly educated, middle-class membership who believed in moderation when it came to arguing for political change, so Unionist suffragists were not treading on particularly dangerous ground, and now that Australia and New Zealand had given their women the vote an international perspective on the question was considered to be entirely justified. The progress of women in other countries towards achieving the vote was a constant source of interest to the women of the CUWFA and there were regular pages in the *Review* devoted to international suffrage issues.

The CUWFA in the provinces

Conservative women who lived outside London, and who wanted to support the suffrage cause and demonstrate their continuing loyalty to the Unionist Party at the same time, were delighted to find that the CUWFA were encouraging the establishment of local branches. The first meetings of the new organisation to be held outside London were in Bath, Bristol, Canterbury, Edinburgh and Glasgow, during January and February 1909.[74] Harriet Packer had been appointed to organise local branches, and she was present in Bristol at a crowded meeting held on 22 February, and in Bath on the following day. Lady Knightley, attended both meetings in her capacity as president of the CUWFA, and she was accompanied by the prominent local suffragist and

former radical, now a Liberal Unionist convert, Lilias Ashworth Hallett. Bristol had a long record of support for the enfranchisement of women, being one of the first cities to set up a suffrage society in 1868, so it was not surprising that it was one of the first to have a CUWFA branch outside London. Edinburgh and Glasgow were the focal points for the beginning of the women's suffrage campaign in Scotland – the former city's first suffrage society had been founded in 1867, even earlier than the one in Bristol. The meetings held in these two cities led to the establishment of CUWFA branches which were to claim Lady Betty Balfour as their president – she had Scottish connections through her marriage to Gerald Balfour.[75]

The visit to Canterbury proved less successful, but by the end of the first year three further branches had been established in Dublin, Hull and Liverpool. The Dublin branch had considerable aristocratic support, particularly from Lady Arnott and the Countess of Fingall, and they set about holding a number of drawing-room meetings and 'Conversaziones' which attracted a growing membership. The new branches in Hull and Liverpool were the only ones to be formed in the north of England until, quite some time afterwards, Liverpool was joined by sister groups in Birkenhead, Chester, Ellesmere and Southport, and a loose grouping called the Lancashire and Cheshire Circle, which included Ashton-under-Lyne, Blackpool and Preston. The north-west of England was known for the strength of its Conservatism, and the Liverpool area had at least two staunchly pro-suffrage MPs, but on the other side of the Pennines Hull was to remain an isolated branch in the East Riding of Yorkshire, and probably owed its existence to the energy of its secretary, Helen Theilmann, a member of the family of a German corn and seed merchant, who managed to secure the support of influential local Unionist Associations.[76]

Although only a small number of branches were established in the provinces in 1909, the figure had more than doubled the following year, and there was a steady annual increase over the next three years, culminating in a total of 71 branches (80 if those in London are included) by the outbreak of war in August 1914.[77] Although never reaching the numbers achieved by the NUWSS and the WSPU, the CUWFA was in a position to claim that in terms of branches it more than matched the Women's Freedom League (WFL), which had been set up in 1907 by disaffected members of the WSPU and had always been viewed as the third partner of the 'triumvirate' of women's suffrage organisations (see table 2 below).[78]

It soon became clear that Liberal predominance in Cornwall, Devon, East Anglia, and much of the urban North-West, Yorkshire and the East Midlands accounted for the fact that there were hardly any groups in these

Table 2
The number of branches in each of the suffrage societies by 1913[79]

	NUWSS	WSPU	WFL	CUWFA
No. of branches	460	90	61	68

areas. Wales, considered to be a bastion of Liberalism, appeared to have never had a branch of the CUWFA, despite the fact that there was a good scattering of Primrose League habitations in the principality. Ursula Masson has indicated that in Cardiff and the surrounding district, for example, Conservative suffragists chose to fight their campaign from inside the local branch of the NUWSS, where 'the Society's president, Mrs Lewis, was an active Tory'.[80] The location of new regional groups was often dependent on whether there was an aristocratic suffragist with local influence. For example, branches were set up in Hitchin, Knebworth and Stevenage, where Lord Lytton had his estate and the Cecils lived nearby at Hatfield, and in Coventry, Kenilworth, Leamington, Rugby, Stratford and Warwick, where Lord and Lady Willoughby de Broke were local landowners and active members of the CUWFA. The East Hampshire branch was centred on Alton, where the Earl and Countess of Selborne, the latter a president of the CUWFA, had their estate, while the Woking branch owed its existence to the fact that Lady Betty Balfour had a house in the vicinity.[81]

The president of a local branch of the CUWFA would invariably be a member of the local Conservative aristocracy, but the secretaries and other officers represented the middle-class suffrage activist, well-educated and predominantly Anglican, many of whom were already involved in a variety of women's organisations which undertook educational and philanthropic work. Biographical information about these women is not always easy to unearth, but some of them were prominent in their local communities and had remarkably similar backgrounds and interests. The secretary of the Edinburgh branch, Rosaline Masson, was unusual in that she came from a radical background – her father was a distinguished university professor and supporter of women's higher education, and her mother had signed the women's suffrage petition in 1866. Masson was already a dedicated suffragist and a member of the NUWSS when she joined the CUWFA in 1909, becoming secretary in 1911.[82] A commitment to women's education was shared by several CUWFA secretaries. Jessie Montgomery, had been the secretary of the local branch of the NUWSS in Exeter before she took

up the same position with the new branch of the CUWFA. She was the niece of Canon Cook of Exeter Cathedral, and as well as being involved in a club for working girls, Montgomery was a member of the local Education Committee, and helped to found the University Extension College which eventually became the University of Exeter.[83] Another educationalist was the secretary of the Cirencester group, Grace Hadow, who also came from a clerical background. Hadow had a distinguished career at Oxford University, becoming a lecturer at Lady Margaret Hall in 1909, and going on to be the vice-president of the first Executive Committee of the National Federation of Women's Institutes in 1917.[84] Mrs Fanny Trustram Eve was the daughter of a Nottinghamshire vicar and the wife of the lawyer, Herbert Trustram Eve. She was the secretary of the Bedford branch of the CUWFA, and was a member, and later President, of the National Council of Women (known as the National Union of Women Workers before 1918), the non-party umbrella organisation for the female members of the numerous philanthropic and charitable societies which had come into existence during the latter half of the nineteenth century. As Lady Trustram Eve she became the chairman of her local Women's Unionist Association, and was active in local politics as a member of the London County Council after World War I.[85]

These women were not untypical representatives of those volunteers who took on the challenge of working for the CUWFA in the provinces, and they were soon organising public meetings, lectures and other events in support of the women's suffrage campaign. They generally had friendly contact with other suffragists through their local government and charitable work, and joint meetings were often held, usually with the NUWSS, particularly at those times when a women's suffrage bill was about to to be brought before the House of Commons. The importance of regular visits from the President and other members of the Executive Committee of the CUWFA was demonstrated by the welcome that speakers like Lady Betty Balfour, Emma Boulnois, Lady Castlereagh, Lady Knightley and the Countess of Selborne received whenever they were able to attend local branch meetings. These visits were usually given good local newspaper coverage, and boosted the morale of what was sometimes a small group struggling to put the Conservative case for women's suffrage in areas where there were already well-established branches of the NUWSS and the WSPU. The larger groups also enjoyed the prestige of a visit from one of the leaders of CUWFA. In a report to the *Review* about a very successful meeting held by the Dublin branch at the beginning of 1910 which was attended by Lady Betty Balfour and Millicent Fawcett of the NUWSS,

they were able to boast that: 'The Irish Times devoted five columns to an account of the meeting and also published an excellent leading article'.[86]

The end of the CUWFA's first year

In November 1909 Asquith was forced to call a general election because of the deepening crisis over the refusal of the House of Lords to pass what they considered to be a 'socialist' Liberal budget. Members of the CUWFA seized the opportunity to lobby and write to Unionist MPs and parliamentary candidates asking them to include a pledge to 'the support the enfranchisement of duly-qualified women' in their election material. They were gratified to announce that 'one hundred and ninety-one Conservative candidates returned affirmative replies', and they declared that each man had shown considerable courage by announcing himself in favour 'of a measure of justice' which was sure to provoke 'the opposition of a section of his party'.[87] However, *Common Cause*, the journal of the NUWSS, reported after the election, held in January 1910, that '42 Tory, 155 Liberal and 54 Labour candidates and 11 Tory, 65 Liberal and 24 Socialist elected members mentioned women's suffrage favourably in the election addresses' – a poor response from the Unionist side, considering the number of pre-election pledges.[88]

As well as carrying out their suffrage work the women were also involved in assisting the Unionist candidates to fight their general election campaign. It was clear that, due to the antipathy between the two main political parties over the question of Lloyd George's budget, the issue of women's enfranchisement was not going to play a major role in the political debate, but they were buoyed up by the encouragement of male supporters, like the Conservative candidate who wrote to advise them that this was a good time to raise the suffrage question 'when members of Parliament have fresh in their memories the knowledge of the great and loyal help willingly given by women workers during the General Election…' The anonymous candidate ended his advice with the assertion that 'the solution of this great question rests more and more with Conservative women and the Unionist Party'.[89] The members of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association approached the opening of the new Parliament in 1910 in the hope that at least the first part of this estimate might prove to be correct.

5

THE CONSERVATIVE & UNIONIST WOMEN'S FRANCHISE REVIEW AND THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE DEBATE

The speeches and campaigning material of Conservative suffragists usually concentrated on the justification of women's suffrage in terms of its value to party, country and empire, and the importance of women being able to influence the debate on the more controversial aspects of Liberal social policy. However, the issues underlying these arguments for women's suffrage were usually presented in journals such as the newly-formed independent suffrage periodical *The Englishwoman* (Lady Jane Strachey was a joint editor), in occasional articles written for newspapers, and, more importantly, in the columns of the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*.[1]

The *Review* was published quarterly from November 1909, and continued through the early years of World War I until it was decided to close the journal for reasons of wartime economy in June 1916.[2] The *Monthly News*, founded in 1914, and intended to be a free news-sheet which contained a convenient summary of the contents of the *Review*, continued to be published until the end of the war. Like most regular journals the *Review* retained the same format throughout its publishing life, although on the outbreak of war news of the women's suffrage campaign was largely replaced by details of the war work being undertaken by members of the CUWFA. The leading article, which had the heading 'The Political Outlook', usually contained up-to-date information and comment about the progress of the political campaign for female enfranchisement, and this was followed by a 'Central Office Report' from the Hon. Secretary,

a Treasurer's Report, Organisers' Report, and news of various committees. Other regular features were 'Notes and Comments', which had news of women's progress in higher education and the professions; 'Suffrage in Foreign Lands'; 'Under the Flag', which contained reports of the progress of women's suffrage throughout the Empire; 'Pioneer Women'; 'Book Reviews', which concentrated on books about the 'woman question'; and 'Branch News', where each branch reported on its work over the previous three months.

In addition to these regular items, every issue of the *Review* contained articles by Conservative supporters which were designed to put forward the CUWFA's case for a limited women's franchise, and there were occasionally contributions from suffragists who were not members of the Unionist Party, for example, Millicent Fawcett, Margery Corbett Ashby and Eva Gore-Booth.[3] One editor of the *Review*, Eveline Mitford, wanted contributors 'with a wide intellectual background, firm convictions, great courage and a broad grasp of essential principles', and she articulated the rationale behind the journal:

> The task before our paper is to educate the men and women of our party on the question of women's suffrage, and on the side issues which directly bear upon it; to make them see the urgent need for this great reform; to tell them the terrible injustices under which so many women live; to point out to them the truth … to stimulate thought and to arouse convictions which may leave lasting impressions that will develop into actions … to further by every means in its power the endeavours made to obtain for women that hall mark of citizenship, without which we suffragists are convinced that all our efforts for improving women's position will be of no permanent value.[4]

The principal articles in the *Review* tended to concentrate on a narrow range of subjects – suffrage and women's citizenship, the Empire and women's suffrage, working women and their entitlement to representation, and the importance of the contribution women could make to political life – and they all emphasised the fact that there were fundamental Conservative principles at the heart of the CUWFA's argument for women's suffrage. There was no question of criticising the existing social structure or repudiating the primary role of women as mothers and homemakers – these ideas were seen by many Conservatives as part of a socialist argument for political and social revolution.[5] On the contrary, an understanding of the importance of the traditional family structure as a stabilising influence on

society and a bulwark against socialism was seen as one of women's strengths and a powerful argument for their enfranchisement. Conservative women were careful to link their own interests as women with the interests of their party and the country as a whole, and Lord Robert Cecil recognised the appeal of this argument when he asserted: 'The important thing to consider in the suffrage question is … what good it will do to the Kingdom and the Empire at large'.[6] This fundamental premise implicitly underpinned the majority of arguments for female enfranchisement that appeared in the *Review*, and was seen not only as an idealistic slogan but also as a practical reason for supporting the CUWFA's suffrage campaign.

The CUWFA and the question of women's citizenship

Some of the most important articles written for the *Review* by Conservative suffragists focussed on the claim for women's suffrage on the basis of their citizenship. In legal terms British people were subjects rather than citizens, but the idea of citizenship was frequently used in the context of the parliamentary franchise. As has already been outlined in previous chapters, in nineteenth-century Britain the main qualifications which a person had to possess in order to enjoy the right to vote were based on property, gender, and residency. The wider and more problematic question of whether a person should possess a certain level of education or understanding to vote had always been the subject of discussion, particularly in the context of working-class men and all women. Citizenship was held to represent more than just the possession of voting rights, it embodied the idea of having reciprocal duties which were owed to the state, which could range from paying taxes or performing military service to participating in public life for the general good.[7] The view of the vote as a privilege rather than a right persisted in the Conservative Party until well into the twentieth century, and was often favourably contrasted with the stress that the 'New Liberalism' appeared to place on 'the duty of the State to its citizens'.[8] While most Liberals believed that the extension of electoral representation was, in principle, a desirable aim, Conservative women had to construct a very good argument to convince their party that *any* extension of the franchise was necessary at all.

Articles on citizenship and women's suffrage in the *Review* could not always agree on the question of whether having the vote would make women citizens or simply grant recognition to their existing citizenship. Conservative suffragists like Edith Castlereagh saw the vote as bestowing citizenship and therefore status on qualified women, and this idea of the vote as a symbol was endorsed in an article by the economist Professor

Urwick: ' … women cannot progress until they have this symbol – this call to citizenship – put before them.' A slightly different perspective was taken by the Hon. Mrs John Bailey, who claimed that women should have the vote on the *grounds* of their citizenship, which they had earned through their participation in the workforce, in local government, and in the home as mothers and educators of the future generation.[9] Mrs Bailey took this well-rehearsed argument a stage further when she claimed that women did not even have to move out of their homes to become involved in politics – they were made citizens by the actions of the state, when it legislated on how and when children were to be educated and under what conditions servants and workers were to be employed:

> The broad ground of citizenship of which I have spoken, means no more than this … that matters of Imperial as well as of purely domestic interest should be considered by the women who, equally with men, constitute the British Empire. The possession of the vote is, after all, the recognised means of expression on all these subjects, and no efficient substitute has yet been found for it.[10]

This kind of argument was the one most often used by the Unionist MPs who supported women's suffrage as well as by the CUWFA – not only was it important that female interests and concerns be represented, but the contribution made by those women who were independent householders who paid rates and taxes, and were family breadwinners, should be recognised not only by the state but also by the Conservative Party. As Lady Arnott, President of the Irish Branch of the CUWFA, pointed out, the injustice was apparent when '…women with a stake in the country, and sharing the responsibilities of citizenship, are denied citizen's rights'.[11]

An honorary vice-president of the CUWFA and contributor to the *Review*, the author John Buchan, also made the concept of citizenship a key part of his article on the question of women's suffrage. In a logical and well-argued case that took up some of the ideas that Lady Arnott had expressed, Buchan appealed to what he believed were the political principles of his Unionist colleagues and suggested that there was nothing about them that conflicted with the enfranchisement of women:

> As I understand the Conservative creed, we believe … that the management of the State should be in the hands of of citizens, and citizens alone. We hold that the franchise depends on citizenship, and we define citizenship as the bearing of certain civic burdens … Now,

> it is incumbent upon Conservatives who accept the 'citizenship' doctrine, to admit no irrelevant tests … To … declare that sex is a bar to the Franchise is an impossible position for a reasonable Conservative to maintain; for, if the vote be denied to an educated and capable woman, who is a real asset to the State and takes a share in its burdens, not because she is not a citizen, but because, unfortunately, she is not a man, you are on the edge of a very dangerous doctrine.[12]

Buchan went on to reassure his readers that it was because the Conservative Party believed in 'organic and continuous development, of orderly and gradual progress' that eligible women should be given the vote. Women had always played a valuable part in British political life behind the scenes, therefore enfranchisement would merely 'regulate' their position by giving them the 'legitimate power' of citizenship. At the same time the 'illegitimate influence' of women would be rightly curbed.[13]

Citizenship was also the subject of an article written by a member of the CUWFA executive committee, Sophy Edmonds. Edmonds explained that Conservatives equated citizenship with the individual's duty to the State, and the contribution that each person could make to 'the welfare and development of the Nation…' For Edmonds the problem was that women were denied the chance to make that contribution:

> Conservatives lay stress on two principles; first that everyone should realize his responsibilities; and secondly, that those who have power should feel the result of their use of it. But under the present system only half of our citizens are encouraged to feel themselves responsible and component parts of the national community; while the rest, – the women who are supposed to be specially concerned with the building up of the national character, – are denied the realisation of their responsibilities (and realisation of responsibility is a great steadying and strengthening force), and are encouraged to look upon themselves as children in national concerns…[14]

Edmonds was speaking at a time of general concern about the condition of the British nation – the report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1904 had revealed the poor physical health of the nation's children, and the conditions of extreme poverty which still existed despite Britain's increased prosperity. The rapid growth of the German and French economies, and the threat posed by their imperial expansion added

to the feelings of national unease. Edmonds believed that if women were granted citizenship, through the vote, they would then be made aware of their duty to make a full contribution to the welfare and development of the nation, and 'national deterioration and decay' would be kept at bay.

As the Liberal Party under Asquith seemed to be moving hesitantly towards the idea of a much wider franchise which would no longer be based on property qualifications, many Conservatives continued to remain preoccupied with the argument over the rights and duties of citizenship. In some respects the Conservative suffragists' argument for female citizenship was not very different from the one put by the Liberal John Stuart Mill over forty years before. It was no co-incidence that many of the founding members of the CUWFA had been profoundly influenced by the speeches and writings of Mill on 'the woman question'.[15] In the memorable speech on women's suffrage given to the House of Commons in 1867 he had claimed that giving women the vote would remove 'an unworthy stigma … from the whole sex', but he had also pointed out that the parliamentary franchise was not for the masses but the educated only, and that the exclusion of women taxpayers violated 'one of the oldest of our constitutional maxims – a doctrine dear to Reformers, and theoretically acknowledged by most Conservatives – that taxation and representation should be co-extensive'.[16] These observations could have been made by any member of the CUWFA, and Martin Pugh has argued that eventually the Conservative case for women's suffrage was 'largely subsumed within the broader case propounded by Liberals and feminists'. In the case of the Conservative argument for women's citizenship his observation may have an element of truth in it.[17]

The CUWFA, the Empire, and argument for women's suffrage

A development that clearly had a considerable effect on some Unionist MPs who supported the cause of female enfranchisement was the colonial experience of women voters – New Zealand had adopted parliamentary women's suffrage in 1893, and this had been followed by women gaining the vote in South Australia in 1894.[18] The suffrage movement had always had to face the problem of the consequences of the enfranchisement of women being unknown and therefore to be feared. The practical experience of the colonies, which, after all, were overwhemingly populated by people of British origin, provided ideal testing grounds for the suffrage experiment. *The Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review* contained regular reports of the success of colonial suffrage movements and the positive influence that the newly-enfranchised women were having on all aspects of society in their respective countries.

Former New Zealand and Australian premiers came to Britain from the 1890s onwards to testify to the beneficial effects of granting women the vote. A former premier of South Australia, Sir John Cockburn, came to Britain in 1898, and was soon speaking on suffrage platforms, including that of the NUWSS and CUWFA. Cockburn's article in the May 1910 edition of the *Review* attempted to reassure Unionists that the votes of women provided continuity rather than change, and argued that their new influence had enabled them 'to look after the physical and moral health of the community'. He listed the reforms that had been secured since women had obtained the vote, including '…the raising of the age of consent to seventeen; numerous acts relating to children and to the health and condition of women in factories and gaols; the appointment of women as inspectors of government institutions; the extension of children's courts … and many others'. Cockburn reassured his readers that in Australia women were just 'as patriotic and imperialistic as are men', and, in a clear appeal to Unionists, he suggested that British women, if they had been enfranchised, would have 'prevented the trade of the Empire going out of the "family," … instead of to our own dominions'.[19] Articles like this placed a great emphasis on the patriotism of women, and their willingness to support national service and military expenditure – Cockburn pointed out 'that it is from those portions of the Empire where the women vote, and from them only, that the offer of Dreadnoughts came', and in an article entitled 'The Empire, the Home and Women's Suffrage', Lady Anna Stout maintained that the women of New Zealand were 'enthusiastic advocates of compulsory military training…' Lady Stout was the wife of the Chief Justice of New Zealand, and her affirmation of the willingness of her female compatriots 'to send their sons to South Africa to help the Motherland' made stirring propaganda for the suffrage cause. All these examples were intended to address the anti-suffragist view that women were inherently pacifist and therefore unsuitable to exercise the parliamentary vote – an argument seen by the CUWFA as a serious barrier when it came to enlisting the support of Unionist MPs.[20] However, although appearances seemed to suggest that women's enfranchisement had been accomplished with relative ease in Australia and New Zealand, there was one vital factor that Conservative suffragists chose to ignore. The supporters of women's suffrage in both those countries had campaigned in an environment where full adult male suffrage had already been introduced, so the idea of giving votes to women had never seemed as threatening to Australasian politicians as it did now to many of their British counterparts.

There were a number of articles in the *Review* that were similar to those of Cockburn and Lady Stout, but there were also contributions that

described the positive benefits of women's imperial work in Britain, and used them to argue the case for women's enfranchisement.[21] For the authors of these articles the formation of organisations like the Victoria League and the League of Empire had shown that women were leading the way in the drive to foster imperial unity – the vision that had been put forward by men like Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Alfred Milner to revive a flagging commitment to Empire in the aftermath of the South African War.[22] Articles on the influence of female imperialism in the *Review* took the view that women were at the forefront of 'Empire building' and eminently suitable to exert, on behalf of the nation, what Chamberlain had described as 'the greatest influence … on the civilization and the peace of the world'.[23] The readers of the *Review* were encouraged to support the patriotic work of the white women settlers, teachers, nurses and church workers in the colonies, and, at home, to promote the emigration of suitable British girls, to educate young people about the benefits of the Empire, and to provide hospitality for colonial visitors.

One important aspect of women's imperial mission was spelled out by Lady Knightley, the president of the British Women's Emigration Association (BWEA), in her contribution to the *Review*. The BWEA wanted to encourage educated women to play their part in 'building up healthy, prosperous, British communities … knitting ever closer the links which bind our great Empire together', and Lady Knightley outlined the opportunities for employment in the colonies for female domestic servants, home helps, farm workers, teachers, nurses, dressmakers, and small-scale entrepreneurs. Although the emphasis was placed on employment there was a strong implication that emigration might lead to marriage, and Lady Knightley concluded her article in the *Review* by assuring potential emigrants that they would be going 'where women are prayed for to make homes for good living men, where women can be mothers of quivers full, without fear of there ever being one too many…'[24] A major part of women's contribution to the imperial enterprise was to be the maintenance of the British race and the transmission of cultural values, and the idea of racial kinship and solidarity was an essential part of the CUWFA's argument for the imperial vote for women. As Mrs Scoresby Routledge argued:

> To a man Empire means the vast possibilities of the English race, the development of trade with the flag, the opening up of the waste places of the earth. To a woman it means all this … but it means also something more. To her the Empire is an aggregate of homes, actual or potential … knit together by the tie of blood or of allegiance to one

> Sovereign. It is because every act, legislative or executive, has its influence on these homes that we hold women have their peculiar contribution to make to the political well-being of the whole common wealth. There is a right burden for the white woman as well as for the white man, and only when every woman shall take up her share of that burden shall we be truly an Imperial race.[25]

Like many other suffrage societies, the CUWFA had to combat the arguments of male imperialist anti-suffragists like Curzon and Milner, who insisted that the maintenance of the British Empire was an essentially masculine enterprise, by arguing that it was women's essential role as wives, mothers and homemakers that would have the most lasting effect on the stability and endurance of the Empire. For Mrs Fabian Ware, the wife of the editor of *The Morning Post* and on the Executive Committee of the CUWFA, this role meant that the British woman's home was 'the nursery of national life … the reproduction of which across the seas will always be the ideal of Imperialism'.[26] For suffragists imperial citizenship was as much about maternal power and the building of healthy and prosperous white communities, as about the ability of men to take up arms to protect and maintain British interests.

Although most of the coverage on imperial issues in the *Review* concentrated on the activities of the white inhabitants of the Empire rather than on the lives of women in the indigenous black and Asian populations, there were a number of short articles on women's work in India. These dealt with two main subjects – the work of British women doctors in setting up hospitals and training local medical staff, and the campaigns that upper-class Indian women were undertaking to expand female education and to promote legislation to protect women and children from physical abuse and sexual exploitation.[27] While these educated Indian women were given due recognition for their educational and social reform work, there remained a belief that 'the patient, ignorant, suffering Eastern woman' needed the 'professional skill, trained intelligence, and womanly sympathy of her Western sister', and that this aid would be more forthcoming 'were the Imperial Government responsible to English women electors as well as to men'.[28] The underlying message being conveyed was that of the Empire as an agent of progress and social development, with British women playing a key role in carrying out what Antoinette Burton has called 'the ideological work of Empire'.[29]

The periodicals of other women's suffrage organisations contained many articles on similar themes – the importance of women's imperial role was

seen as an essential part of the argument for the vote – but in terms of space the *Review* chose to place white colonial women's work above the work of British women in Africa and India.[30] The CUWFA believed that the fact that women in Australia and New Zealand already had the vote, and that the sexes were participating successfully alongside each other in political debate at the electoral level, would reassure those Unionist MPs who were fearful that increased political power for women would inevitably lead to conflict between the sexes. The Primrose League's oath of allegiance to Empire and the Women's Amalgamated Unionist and Tariff Reform Association's commitment to imperial unity indicated that Conservative women had always taken their imperial responsibilities very seriously. The articles on women's imperial work in the *Review*, which were always to be found below the heading 'Under the Flag', helped to put these responsibilities into the context of the campaign for female enfranchisement, and, as far as the CUWFA were concerned, contained ample evidence of women's entitlement to become full citizens of the Empire.

The CUWFA and the Political Representation of Working Women

Although the CUWFA had always argued for a limited franchise, which would give the vote to women householders who paid rates and taxes in respect of their property, they had to convince enough Liberal and Labour MPs that their proposal was not just for the benefit of wealthy women who would vote Conservative, but would enfranchise a proportion of working-class women too. A group that particularly concerned Conservative suffragists were those working-class women who contributed to society through the payment of rates and taxes, and whose paid employment maintained a home and family. Figures had been produced to show that a substantial percentage of the women who would receive the vote under the limited franchise proposals would be working-class widows and single women who bore 'the full burdens of citizenship', and the women of the CUWFA were anxious to reassure sympathetic members of other political parties that working-class women who had 'a stake in the country' were included in their campaign for women's suffrage.[31] As Cicely Wroughton wrote in the *Review*:

> … anyone who really understood the vast importance of the vote to all classes of women would have to be extraordinarily narrow-minded and selfish, to wish the privilege to be confined solely to women who live inside park gates. The very difference between the lives and needs of the classes, proves how necessary is the vote to all women possessing the qualification of the present electors.[32]

Although the CUWFA were happy to argue for independent women to have the vote, they believed that most working-class women would need the votes of their more privileged sisters to protect their interests. Lady Arnott, the President of CUWFA's Irish Branch, was a contributor to the *Review* who agreed with this analysis: 'The last Census Report stated that over four million women and girls were working for their living, and it is necessary for duly-qualified women to possess the parliamentary vote that they may look after and safeguard … this great mass of workers'.[33] The duty of the privileged to help those less fortunate than themselves was a constant theme of Conservative suffragists – in her article for the *Review*, entitled 'Contented Women', Rosaline Masson launched a scathing attack on the complacency of those privileged women who denied the necessity for women's enfranchisement, and argued that even if they did not want the vote for themselves it was desperately needed to protect the interests of working-class women:

> …these thoughtless women … who are worse enemies to the Cause of Women's Emancipation than even our open enemies … are, all unconsciously, hindering a movement that is being carried on chiefly for the sakes of those many women … who daily feel the chafing of the fetters of unjust laws; women who are struggling in an unequal market to support not only themselves but others whom they love and who are dependent on them … It may be that your interests are one with those of your husband, and that you feel yourself represented by him; and that your troubles, if you have any, are those for which there are no political remedies … But the woman in the back lane within a stone's throw from you … sees her poorly-paid trade threatened by a paternal government, and she belongs to a class that is not backed by voting power.[34]

Masson's description of the plight of working women encapsulated many of the difficulties that faced them during the years before World War I. One of the problems that preoccupied contributors to the *Review* was the increasing hostility of male trade unionists to the growth of female employment. As the nature of industrial work changed and tasks became less skilled and more automated, women were being taken on to do the jobs formerly done by the men. The trade unions, having used their industrial power to negotiate good wages, were upset by the fact that employers were paying their female workers at a much lower rate, and their members were agitating for women to be withdrawn from factory work. As the author of

one article in the *Review* concluded, '…the natural inference to be drawn is that so long as men are assured of a living wage, how *women* are to live is a secondary consideration.'[35] Conservative suffragists, as well as some of the older generation of Liberal women like Lady Frances Balfour and Millicent Fawcett, were inclined to be against any limitation of women's opportunities for employment – most of them were the products of a political tradition which placed great importance on the individual's freedom to support him or herself through work, and they believed that this principle could be protected by the power of female enfranchisement.

The campaign to support women's freedom to work without unnecessary restriction can be traced back to the 1880s, when the veteran Conservative suffragist, Jessie Boucherett, had joined the Liberty and Property Defence League (LPDL), partly because of their policy that women's conditions of work should not be regulated. This work was continued by the Freedom of Labour Defence (FLD), founded by Boucherett and fellow suffragist Helen Blackburn in 1899, and joined by Lady Knightley shortly afterwards. The following year Lady Knightley spoke at a well-attended meeting of the FLD, under the auspices of the Primrose League, and outlined the objects of the organisation, which was to stop those who wished to prevent adult women 'from making the best of the opportunities and powers they have of earning a honest living'.[36] The work of the FLD chiefly consisted of campaigning against any proposal which would limit the scope of women's employment opportunities, including home-working, and this meant that they often came into conflict with the increasing interest in supporting legislation to protect working women that was being shown by many socialist and trade unionist women – an issue which will be discussed later on in the conclusion of this part of the current chapter.[37]

Although the Conservative suffragists who wrote about the problems of working women in the *Review* agreed that there should be as little restrictive legislation as possible, many of the issues concerning women's work were complex, and they soon discovered that there were no simple solutions. The fact that poorly-paid women, who were rarely members of a trade union, were ousting well-paid men from their jobs, posed a dilemma that they never satisfactorily resolved. One of the few male contributors to the debate, John Cameron Grant, took a fatalistic view of the problem, 'attempts have been made on the part of some of the Unions to prevent women doing certain work, and so by protective and restrictive measures keeping the work in men's hands … it is an absolutely vain attempt. It is not by means such as this that the waters of economic change can be

dammed back'. For Grant there was a step that could be taken which might lead to some improvement: 'The working woman, as well as the working man, if she fulfils similar civic conditions, must have the vote'.[38] Edith Castlereagh agreed with Grant's analysis, and she, too, argued that the vote would mean power – 'power to enforce the recognition of the wishes and wants of the possessor' – but was prepared to admit that '…the whole problem is so vast and so intricate that to find a sound solution will be very difficult indeed'.[39]

Rose Graham, a member of the Oxford branch of the CUWFA, began her article entitled 'Married Women in Industry' by quoting from the report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration: 'The right of married women to the fruits of their own labour … ought not to be lightly interfered with'. Graham was interested in the anti-suffragist accusation that married women who went out to work neglected their children, with the result that they experienced a higher rate of infant deaths than those women that stayed at home. Quoting evidence from the Medical Officer for Health in Birmingham which refuted this allegation, she went on to argue that ' in the existing industrial conditions thousands of married women are forced into the labour market', and 'the result of further prohibitive legislation will be, in many cases, to drive the woman who is forbidden to work in the factory, for a wage which in Lancashire may be over a pound a week, into the … worse paid occupations of charwoman or housescrubber'. Graham drew the conclusion that ' an unrepresented class has no valid security for the enjoyment of rights, the parliamentary vote is the sole guarantee for the continuous possession of those rights'.[40]

The National Insurance Act, which was introduced by the Liberal government in 1911, was seen as a further example of the injustice meted out to working women, and sparked off several complaints in the *Review* about the 'double standard' that was being applied to them when it came to the value of the benefits to be received. The Act introduced health insurance and a limited unemployment insurance, for which workers had to pay contributions according to their income. For example, for men and women earning less than fifteen shillings a week, the contribution was the same for both sexes, but women received two shillings and sixpence less in sickness benefit – as one contributor to the *Review*, the radical suffragist and opponent of protective legislation Eva Gore-Booth, observed: 'It seems like the last straw that breaks the camel's back … to be penalized by the Government in their insurance benefit simply on account of their sex'. The unemployment insurance was equally discriminatory – only workers in certain heavy industries were selected for the scheme, and no women's trade was chosen –

as Gore-Booth pointed out, this was a 'quietly-introduced sex-barrier'.[41] Although many Conservatives had opposed the introduction of the National Insurance scheme, the unfair discrimination shown against working women under the terms of the Bill once it became law was used as a potent example of a case where women needed the vote to obtain a measure of justice. As another contributor concluded: 'One virtue of the National Insurance Bill is that it has brought home to large sections of the British public the reasonableness of women's demand for political enfranchisement'.[42]

In her survey of the women's movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Linda Walker has suggested that elite women believed in a 'sentimental individualism' which betrayed an ignorance of the working conditions of the poor.[43] It is true that that some of those who advocated protectionist legislation, like the Fabian socialist and anti-suffragist (until 1906), Beatrice Webb, were fiercely critical of anti-protectionist women from the privileged classes. It was they, she claimed, who often advocated women's suffrage as the cure for the problems of working women but knew nothing about the reality of their lives. Webb even went so far as to suggest that the 'able and devoted ladies' of the upper classes were 'seeking to alarm working women by prophesying, as the result of further Factory legislation, the dismissal of women and girls from employment…'[44] The truth was that many of the women of the CUWFA did have a knowledge of working-class life through their philanthropic and local government activities – it was not through ignorance that they opposed protective legislation. After a visit to a homeworker's house in the slums of Leytonstone in 1908 Lady Knightley had admitted in her Journal that the conditions were appalling – 'It is monstrous … Yet there is a case where the abolition of homework would cause great hardship'.[45] It should not be forgotten that many of the members of the CUWFA were the wives and daughters of employers, and were employers themselves. The articles in the *Review* revealed not only the persistence of a belief in economic libertarianism among Conservative women, but also reflected a conviction that giving working women parliamentary representation, either directly or indirectly, might in some way address the voting power of the organised trade unions, which was increasingly successful in protecting the interests of working men. The fear that the 'deceptive and alluring doctrine of socialism' with its 'panacea for all ills' might seem attractive to working-class women was always present, and if protective legislation was not to be considered, then female enfranchisement might be able to address the economic and social problems of women workers.[46] However, the CUWFA was swimming against the tide of opinion on the question of protectionist

policies. Despite the fact that after women achieved limited enfranchisement in 1918 the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (the successor to the NUWSS) continued the campaign for equal opportunities for working women, the pendulum began to swing towards the introduction of what Olive Banks has called 'welfare feminism', and this move came to be accepted by women across the classes during the later inter-war years.[47]

Woman – 'the complement of man and not his subject'[48]

There were a number of articles in the *Review* which attempted to identify and analyse the distinctive mental and moral qualities which Conservative suffragists believed enfranchised women could bring to the government of Britain and her Empire. In addition to putting forward some of the more pragmatic reasons for Conservative women desiring more political power – for example, to look after women's interests through legislation and to assist the Unionist Party – the CUWFA believed that it was just as important to counter the argument of the anti-suffragists that women were temperamentally unsuited to exercise the parliamentary vote. In their speeches and articles Conservative suffragists invariably took their lead from Lord Salisbury's speech in Edinburgh in 1888, in which he indicated that he saw 'no argument' for excluding women from voting for MPs: 'It is obvious that they are abundantly as well fitted as many who now possess the suffrage, by knowledge, by training, and by character, and that influence is likely to weigh … in the direction of morality and religion'.[49] The respected former Prime Minister had encapsulated one of the arguments for women's suffrage which had always appealed to Conservatives – that the educated, Anglican, and in all likelihood, propertied, woman could provide a strong moral counterweight to the forces of atheism and socialism.

Lord Robert Cecil was one of those whose contributions to the *Review* addressed the subject of the importance of women's moral influence on society. Cecil was what E. H. H. Green has termed an 'Individualist Conservative', whose strong views on a number of issues such as tariff reform, labour relations, and women's suffrage were at odds with the majority of his parliamentary colleagues.[50] His commitment to female enfranchisement was based on a deeply-held belief in the justice of the cause, and in the special moral qualities that women could bring to the political life of the country, which, he thought, were superior to those of men. The strength of Cecil's views on the subject may have been the result of his lively and unconventional family background, where adults and children of both sexes were actively encouraged to participate in

philosophical, political and religious discussion. His mother, Lady Salisbury, was clever and articulate, and although she devoted herself entirely to supporting her husband's career and managing the vast household at Hatfield, her marriage was a genuine partnership of equals.[51] In an article entitled 'Women's Sphere', Cecil attacked the anti-suffrage argument for 'using the language of ineradicable prejudice', and made a plea for women's suffrage which closely echoed that of his father but was more emotional in tone:

> And above all, I say that by long tradition and inheritance they [women] have a deeper feeling for morality and religion … I say that we should act foolishly and almost criminally if we excluded from the Parliamentary vote those who will bring to the consideration of all these questions a deep sense of religion and spirituality much higher and much deeper than is possessed by the male sex of this community.[52]

Cecil's belief that the enfranchisement of women would have a stabilising influence on the government of the country was shared by his brother-in-law and contributor to the *Review*, the Earl of Selborne. Selborne soon dismissed the usual anti-suffrage arguments – women's lack of education, of physical strength, of interest in the vote – as ones that could equally be marshalled against many men, and ended his article with a plea for women's suffrage which did not rely on practical experience but on his personal convictions about the essential nature of women:

> I trust the women's instinct more than I do the men's. I believe that their feelings are deeper, less susceptible of change, less susceptible of conflicting emotion … I most firmly believe that giving the vote to women would be establishing the bulwarks of eternal strength, both for the Country and for the home.[53]

These two aristocratic suffragists were not the only male contributors to the *Review* who placed a great emphasis on the moral superiority of women as an argument for their enfranchisement. Professor Urwick of King's College, London, provided an academic view of women's suitability for the parliamentary vote, and in his article he agreed with the Earl of Selborne about the value of female instincts and feelings when it came to political decision-making. Using language similar to that employed by Selborne, Urwick claimed that '…men are quite as emotional as women, but women

have another kind of emotion which is finer, deeper and better. Most of them bring this emotion into play upon many important questions far more than men do, and this is exactly what we want'.[54] Another contribution, written by the lawyer George Freeman, put forward the view that women who worked to support themselves and their families deserved the vote, but also argued that women's special moral qualities were important for the good government of the country:

> There is, I think, in most great bodies of people, a desire to do the right thing … and women having a keener sense of justice, possess a great advantage over the other sex. I think also, that women have a more real regard in their hearts for the truth. No one has a greater desire to see truth triumph, even if the roof falls in, than woman, and I therefore think her presence in public life would be a great advantage.[55]

It is interesting to speculate why the majority of articles in the *Review* which expressed these kinds of sentiments were written by male supporters of the CUWFA. It has already been mentioned that Lord Robert Cecil was brought up in a liberal environment where both sexes contributed to family discussions, and both he and his brother-in-law were married to intelligent, independent women with whom they shared their political concerns, and from whom they regularly sought advice. In view of these personal experiences one might have expected the two men to have depended on an argument in favour of female enfranchisement which emphasised the intellectual ability of women to make sound political judgments, rather than on one which relied on the value of what they considered to be innate female qualities.

The anti-suffrage argument that women were too much a prey to their emotions and instincts to make rational political decisions ran alongside the claim that women's superior moral nature would in some way be sullied by participation in parliamentary elections. Lady Robert Cecil wittily observed that the argument had moved from one that alleged 'that woman is not good enough for the vote', to one that insisted 'that the vote is not good enough for her'.[56] In their articles Lord Robert Cecil, Selborne, Urwick and Freeman attempted to quash both these arguments simultaneously by maintaining that the emotional depth and spiritual awareness of women were important qualities which *should* be brought to bear on political questions, and in doing so they 'subverted yet also reinforced tradition'.[57] They agreed that there were essential differences between men and women,

but it was, as Pugh has put it, 'the political implications of gender difference' which divided the pro and anti-suffragists.[58] By arguing that womanly qualities should be introduced into the realm of national politics, these Conservative men were helping to establish the groundwork for a gradual, albeit reluctant, acceptance of the increasing feminisation of the political culture.

Two female contributors to the *Review* took up a similar theme to the men, and attempted to address the anti-suffragist notion of the 'ideal' woman. In an early article Lady Betty Balfour posited two 'diametrically opposed' versions of this 'ideal' – one was typified by Eve, Adam's helpmate, who was 'subject to man, protected by him, worked for by him', and the other was represented by the earth goddess of classical mythology, Demeter, who was 'the complement of man, not his subject … No weakness about her, no fear, no surrender, no pettiness … It is to this ideal that I, for my part, give my allegiance…'[59] Lady Balfour went on to explain that her ideal woman would have a relationship to man which was '…neither exalted on a pedestal above him, nor sitting on a footstool at his feet, but travelling side by side and hand in hand with him through life's pilgrimage'. Anti-suffragists might have replied that there was nothing about this ideal that negated their view that women undertook different but equally important and fulfilling domestic duties which precluded them from playing a part in national political life. However, Lady Balfour believed that complementarity meant something very different – for she saw men and women working alongside each other not just in the home but in the political and social world outside:

> …woman may glory indeed in the boast that the home is her sphere, but what does that boast involve? That everything which is vital to the life of the nation is her sphere. Employment, health, wealth, education, old age and infancy, art, science, politics and religion are her concerns. Nothing which touches the interests of the great human family is outside woman's sphere.

Lady Balfour's article attempted to create a feminine ideal that was not bound by the Christian image of the submissive woman. In this construction the predominant view of the female sex was that of the 'fallen' woman of the Genesis story in the Old Testament – because of her original sin, Eve and the rest of her sex had been condemned to undergo the pain of childbirth and live in subordination to men.[60] For Lady Balfour the answer lay in a republican image of woman, the goddess Demeter, the allegorical representation of the

earth mother with none of the negative connotations of the Eve figure. In the suffrage debate the image of classical woman was used in both pro and anti-suffrage pictorial propaganda as the stereotypical idea of womanly nobility, but for the suffragist she represented the moral power of the mother at work in the world, and for the anti-suffragist she stood for that same power in the home and its environs.[61] There were echoes of Mary Wollstonecraft's writing in Lady Balfour's article – the late eighteenth-century proponent of women's rights had rejected what she called 'the prevailing opinion that woman was created for man', and asserted that 'would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us … better citizens'.[62] The continuous reworking of the representation of woman to suit the political and social requirements of the times had persisted throughout the centuries – Lady Balfour's article demonstrated the struggle of the suffragists to construct a female image which could adequately convey their ideal of the political woman.

The existence of the informal power of women, so lauded by many anti-suffragists, and which was to be condemned as 'illegitimate' by John Buchan, was questioned by Lady Robert Cecil in a spirited contribution to the *Review*. Picking up some of the ideas expressed by Lady Balfour, and using what could be termed a feminist argument, Lady Cecil alleged that in reality any informal moral and social influence women had was 'largely discounted' in a society where key institutions such as the Church, the Law, and Parliament were dominated and controlled by men.[63] Far from being respected for their moral integrity, she argued, women were often regarded as minors and treated with 'paternal restrictions and inhibitory criticisms', and she concluded that 'to be … a National danger and at the same time morally influential is a paradox too subtle for use in daily life'. In many ways more outspoken than some of her colleagues, Lady Cecil maintained that the same double standards towards women pervaded what she called 'country house life', where public statements about their 'powerful influence' were belied by disparaging attitudes towards them in the home:

> The acknowledged defects of the public school system are not likely to be corrected in homes where the words "all women" and "no women" commonly preface some unflattering generalisation, and where boys are taught that a girl is "only" a girl. In the propertied and leisured classes it is still common to hear the birth of female infants announced with regret and apology. Possibly fashionable opinion is right, and women are in truth creatures of secondary value, so that it is even permissable to regard the birth of a female soul as a mild

> misfortune; but if so, in common honesty let us leave off all the fine talk about woman's powerful influence in the home.

Although she was part of the political and social élite, Lady Cecil was prepared to criticise the misogynistic tendencies of her own class in her defence of women's claim to the parliamentary vote. In her article she exposed some of the contradictions in Edwardian cultural and social attitudes towards women, because she believed that 'prevailing social opinion tended to destroy their confidence in their own sex'. Female enfranchisement would mean that there was official recognition that women were as capable as men of carrying out the duties of citizenship, and she agreed with Professor Urwick when he argued that '…women cannot progress until they have this symbol – this call to citizenship – put before them'.[64] Lady Cecil's certainty about the rightness of the suffrage cause was evident from the concluding words of her article: '…this is one of those cases where the granting of a reform is not so much a great good, as the witholding of it is a great evil'.

In a polemical article for the *Review*, Lady Willoughby de Broke also used a broadly feminist critique to support her main argument for women's suffrage which was based on the benefits to Britain and her Empire of strengthening the race through the greater participation of women in political life.[65] She began with the observation that women were 'awakening from a long sleep' and discovering that they suffered from 'sex helplessness' when it came to remedying the injustices meted out to their own sex. Lady Willoughby de Broke then presented a list of these injustices – young girls 'made responsible for their own ruin at the hands of some unscrupulous man who incurs no punishment', unmarried mothers powerless to obtain support because the law 'gives the man every facility to evade his responsibility', a wife denied the means to obtain maintenance for herself and her children from her husband 'should he refuse to support them', and numerous other examples of the law reinforcing the moral 'double standard' which penalised women but did not hold men accountable for their actions. Lady Willoughby de Broke and her husband were both supporters of the eugenics movement, and strongly believed in the importance of improving the quality of the British race, so it was inevitable, perhaps, that she made a link between this aspiration and the need for women to campaign for moral reform. The importance of women's role as mothers did not conflict with this latter goal – on the contrary, Lady Willoughby de Broke believed that it was *because* of their maternal instincts that women should be enfranchised:

> Suffragists often receive severe condemnation for bringing forward these vital questions … but until we can get them ventilated, and until we can spread a wider knowledge of these and many other evils, and also acquire the necessary driving power of the vote so as to secure the attention of Members of Parliament, we shall be fighting this battle with our sword-arms tied behind our backs … Let us hear no more of the "unsexing" of woman through her desire to share in the duties of evolving better conditions for the future race. On the contrary, it is the sex-instinct of motherhood which is driving her to insist upon being allowed to put her shoulder to the wheel, side by side with the men … If there be sex bitterness in the future, let the blame be laid upon those who have brought it about, not upon the women.

These few articles were the most significant examples of those in the *Review* that attempted to examine some of the ideas about the nature of women and their role in society which lay behind the pro and anti-suffrage arguments. The Conservative affiliation of the male contributors was revealed in their regard for the depth of women's adherence to their religion and its importance to the stability of society – it is important to remember that one of the key components of the Primrose League pledge was 'the maintenance of religion'. Similarly, the Earl of Selborne's belief that women's feelings were 'deeper, less susceptible of change', reflected the popular Conservative view that women were inherently conservative in temperament and would favour orderly and gradual progress rather than revolutionary change. It was not a particularly Conservative idea to believe that enfranchised women could bring a greater moral integrity to the political sphere, but these men went further than many of their fellow male suffragists when they claimed that, compared to women, men did not have such a highly developed regard for the principles of truth and justice. However, despite their realisation that many female attributes were unrecognised and that there was still 'ineradicable prejudice' against women playing a full part in the political life of the nation, the authors of these articles did not attempt to examine in more detail the reasons for that prejudice.

The articles by Lady Betty Balfour, Lady Robert Cecil and Lady Willoughby de Broke were surprisingly feminist in tone. However, while Lady Willoughby de Broke maintained that improving women's status in society was not just for their benefit but for the good of the Empire, the other two women showed a greater concern for the welfare of women as a sex rather than the benefits that their enfranchisement might bring to the country or the Conservative Party. Their insights into the subordination of

women within society could have been written by any member of the NUWSS or the WSPU. Lady Robert Cecil's exposure of the disparaging attitudes towards women and girls shown by the aristocracy was aimed at discomfiting her own class, and at the same time enabling them to understand the basis of much of the anti-suffrage argument. In a similar way Lady Balfour's rejection of Eve as the female ideal was designed to expose the long-term persistence of a negative model of womanhood. These arguments were not new, for women like Mary Wollstonecraft had begun the debate about the construction of femininity over one hundred years before, but now they were specifically addressed to a class of women who had rarely thought of themselves as the 'creatures of secondary value' described by Lady Robert Cecil. She and Lady Balfour had taken note of the words of Eveline Mitford, the editor of the *Review*, when she had outlined some of the reasons for publishing the journal: '…to educate the men and women of our party on the question of women's suffrage … to tell them the terrible injustices under which so many women live; to point out to them the truth…'[66]

Conclusion

For some contributors to the *Review* the good which women could do for the Empire was one of the most compelling reasons for giving them the vote. The anti-suffragist contention that there would be no respect for Britain from her colonies if women were involved in imperial government was rejected in favour of an argument based on the importance of women as 'mothers of the race'. Women empowered by the vote could contribute to 'the political well-being of the whole common wealth' by taking up their share of the 'white man's burden'. However, for other contributors the imperial dimension was relatively unimportant when there were so many deep-seated equalities between the sexes that remained to be addressed. Rosaline Masson's chief concern was for the working woman, and she and her colleague Cicely Wroughton were prepared to criticise the privileged classes for their complacency about the plight of women who had no power to protect their own interests. Although Masson argued from a feminist perspective, as Lady Betty Balfour and Lady Robert Cecil had done, all these women were committed to the idea that the Conservative Party should adopt women's suffrage as a policy, and they continued to dedicate themselves to their work for the CUWFA – there was no temptation 'to sink their party for the sake of the female sex'.[67]

The articles that have been discussed in this chapter were the chief examples of those that attempted to 'educate' Conservatives about the key

issues which underpinned the women's suffrage debate. The majority of authors were careful to link these issues to the promotion of core Conservative values such as the importance that the party placed on the need for organic rather than revolutionary change, the maintenance of social order, the preservation of the Empire, the defence of religion and the need to resist the threat of socialism. Women were seen as both Conservative and conservative, and their moral authority and steadying influence would be a powerful force for good at home and in the Empire – to a certain extent the *Review* was preaching to the converted.

6

CONSERVATIVE SUFFRAGISTS AND THE 1910 CONCILIATION BILL

The idea of a Conciliation Bill

On 18 January 1910, H. N. Brailsford, a Liberal journalist and member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage, wrote to Millicent Fawcett outlining a plan for establishing a Conciliation Committee for Women's Suffrage.[1] In September 1909 Brailsford had resigned from the *Daily News*, a Liberal newspaper owned by George Cadbury, over the paper's refusal to condemn the forcible feeding of the suffragettes, and soon afterwards he began his efforts to bring about a non-partisan parliamentary solution to the suffrage question.[2] A factor which favoured a new women's suffrage initiative at this time was the result of the January 1910 general election, called because of the rejection of the Liberal budget by the House of Lords. Although they lost their majority in the House of Commons, the Liberals continued to govern with the support of Irish Nationalist and Labour MPs, and the latter party was known to be generally in favour of the enfranchisement of women, although it was with the proviso that it accompanied adult male suffrage.[3]

In his letter to Fawcett, Brailsford suggested the formation of a committee which 'should not be large, and should consist of both men & women', with the aim of undertaking 'the necessary diplomatic work of promoting an early settlement' of the women's suffrage question, with the goodwill of all political parties. After managing to obtain the WSPU's agreement to a temporary cessation of militant activities, Brailsford set about establishing what became known as the Conciliation Committee for Women's Suffrage. Early in February Brailsford wrote to the Conservative Earl of Lytton to ask him if he would accept the chairmanship of the Committee, and he outlined the tasks that it might usefully undertake:

Among the work which this Committee might do would be:–

1. to help to secure for this Bill a good place in the ballot;
2. to obtain signatures from prominent men in all walks of life to a reasoned memorial asking for an immediate settlement;
3. to suggest the passing of resolutions in the same sense from Town Councils and other public bodies; and (4), its main task, to bring its whole influence to bear upon sympathetic members of both front benches, in order to obtain facilities for this Bill, when carried on the second reading.[4]

Lytton agreed to the proposal, and by the end of February 1910 twelve suffragist MPs representing all the political parties had become members, to be joined by a rising number of additional participants, making a total of forty-three by July.[5] The idea of adding representatives from the suffrage societies was dropped for tactical reasons, since it was believed that militants and non-militants sitting together on the same committee might prove problematic, and that an all-party group of MPs would be in a much better position to influence their colleagues to support any new women's suffrage proposal.

Brailsford faced all the usual problems in bringing before the Committee a suffrage bill that they could all agree to support. The Liberal members were naturally fearful of a propertied women's franchise, believing it would enlarge the Unionist vote, while an adult suffrage suffrage measure was anathema to the Unionists and would be opposed by the House of Lords. In addition, the Irish Nationalists were concerned that any Home Rule Bill would be jeopardised should Asquith be defeated on the suffrage question. The idea was to remove the sex disability, and Brailsford concluded that the best compromise would be the adoption of women's enfranchisement on the basis of the municipal qualification, that is, for women householders and £10 occupiers. The Unionists insisted that no married woman should have a vote for the same property as her husband, so that the proposal covered just over a million women.

Despite its name, the Conciliation Bill caused controversy from the moment of its publication, primarily because the concerns of influential potential Liberal supporters like Lloyd George and Churchill (the latter having initially approved the work of the Conciliation Committee) had not been sufficiently addressed. Although some Liberals might have favoured the fact that women property owners did not specifically qualify for a vote under the proposals, and those who did qualify as householders could in theory be working-class as well as middle and upper-class women, the problem was that the measure was not democratic enough for men like Lloyd George,

who were looking ahead to the achievement of adult suffrage. Churchill agreed with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but his main criticism of the Bill was that it would encourage 'faggot' voting, which occurred when wealthy men distributed surplus property among female relatives to secure extra votes. Like their ministerial colleagues, many Liberals who were ostensibly sympathetic to women's suffrage saw the Bill as an over-cautious and unsatisfactory measure which favoured the Unionist Party.

The Unionist members of the Conciliation Committee

The fourteen Unionist MPs who had joined the Conciliation Committee by the beginning of July 1910 were of different ages, backgrounds and status, and occupied the backbenches of the House of Commons. At first glance they had little in common with each other except their willingness to publicly commit themselves to finding a solution to the suffrage question. The Unionist members, led by the Earl of Lytton, were Gerald Arbuthnot, Sir William Bull, Capt. James Craig, Harry Seymour Foster, Edward Alfred Goulding, John Sutherland Harmood-Banner, Frederick Leverton Harris, John Henniker Heaton, Charles MacArthur (who died in early July), the Hon. William Ormsby-Gore, Basil Peto, Sir John Scurrah Randles, James Farquharson Remnant and Sir John Rolleston.[6] The committed suffragist Lord Robert Cecil would have been a natural addition to the Conciliation Committee, but he had lost his East Marylebone parliamentary seat because of his support for free trade, and was not able to join his colleagues until 1911, when he was returned as the MP for the Hitchin division of Hertfordshire.

William Ormsby-Gore was from an aristocratic family and heir to the third Baron Harlech, but the rest of the Unionist MPs on the Conciliation Committee were from more varied backgrounds. In many ways these men were typical representatives of the prosperous and propertied middle class who became 'villa Tories' during the late 1880s, in reaction to the increased radicalism of Liberal Party policies. They came predominantly from industry and the professions, particularly the fields of accountancy and the law. At the time they joined the Committee, Bull, Goulding and Remnant were members of the legal profession, Foster and Harmood-Banner were chartered accountants, Craig was a stockbroker, MacArthur was an insurance adjuster, and Rolleston a surveyor. Leverton Harris and Randles were industrialists – a ship-owner and iron-master respectively. Arbuthnot had been a midshipman in the navy between 1886 and 1891, before becoming private secretary to Walter Long, who was President of the Board of Agriculture (1895-99) and President of the Local Government Board

(1901-02) under Lord Salisbury; Henniker Heaton had spent the first half of his life in Australia as a respected journalist; Peto was a businessman with an interest in the family building firm.

The ages and experience of the Unionist MPs on the Committee are of interest. Eight out of the fourteen were under fifty years old, with Ormsby-Gore being the youngest at only twenty-five years of age. Arbuthnot, Ormsby-Gore and Peto had only just entered the House of Commons as a result of the general election held in January 1910, Craig and Harmood-Banner had been MPs since 1906 and 1905 respectively, while Bull, Leverton Harris, Randles, Remnant and Rolleston had first gained their seats in the 'khaki' election of 1900. Only Foster, Goulding, Henniker Heaton and MacArthur were longstanding members from the time of Lord Salisbury's administrations of the 1880s and 1890s.[7] The comparative youth of the Unionist members may have made them more used to the idea of women participating in public life, but there were a number of other reasons for them becoming committed to the idea of a limited women's suffrage.

On an individual basis, at least two of the Unionists on the Conciliation Committee came from particular backgrounds which, it could be argued, influenced them to support the principle of women's suffrage. One example of this was the Hon. William Ormsby-Gore, who was elected as the Unionist MP for Denbigh in January 1910. This success marked the beginning of a notable career in the Colonial Office after the First World War, and marriage to Lady Beatrice Cecil, the grand-daughter of Lord Salisbury, in 1913. During his lifetime the former Conservative Prime Minister had expressed his support for the enfranchisement of women, and two of his children – Maud, Countess of Selborne and Lord Robert Cecil – had become actively involved in the constitutional suffrage movement. It is possible to speculate that Ormsby-Gore was exposed early on in his political career to the progressive views on this issue held by the Cecil family, and responded by joining the Conciliation Committee.

The apparent benefits that granting women the vote had brought to New Zealand and Australia were particularly influential on another Unionist member of the Committee. The long-serving MP for Canterbury, John Henniker Heaton, had spent the early part of his life as a journalist in Australia and was a strong promoter of that country's interests. Labelled as a 'progressive' Conservative, he had been in Australia during the early years of a women's suffrage campaign which had soon seen success during the 1890s. Henniker Heaton was convinced of the benefits that female enfranchisement had brought to Australia, and his membership of the

Conciliation Committee brought the dimension of colonial experience to its arguments in favour of women's suffrage.

Most of the Unionists on the Conciliation Committee were involved in some way or another in the 'legion of leagues' that had emerged from the ranks of disaffected Unionism from the 1880s onwards.[8] They were a mixture of Primrose Leaguers, municipal reformers, tariff reformers, anti-socialists and social reformers, and their names appear on numerous membership lists of organisations connected with these causes, including the London Municipal Society, the Tariff Reform Commission and League, the Anti-Socialist Union, the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (as honorary vice-presidents) and the Unionist Social Reform Committee (see table 3). It is possible to trace a link between the rationale of some of these organisations and the idea that enfranchising propertied women could help to further the causes that they represented.

Unionists, anti-socialism and women's suffrage

One of these causes – that of anti-socialism – was the preoccupation of several members of the Unionist MPs on the Conciliation Committee. The collectivist ideas of 'New Liberalism' had been seen as a threat to class harmony from the time that Lord Salisbury had published his article, 'Disintegration', in 1883. Apart from Peto, who represented the rural constituency of Devizes in Wiltshire, the Unionist members represented urban constituencies, some with large working-class populations, and it was in such areas that the newly emerging Labour Party commanded the greatest support.

The Anti-Socialist Union of Great Britain (ASU) had been launched in 1908, as the result of initiatives by the Conservative Party's National Union, and the London Municipal Society (the LMS was the organisation founded in 1894 to combat the radical 'Progressives' on the London County Council). Sir William Bull and Sir John Rolleston were two of the most prominent members of the ASU, providing much of the funding for the training of speakers and the production of literature, including the printing of the organisation's journal, which was called *The Anti-Socialist* from its first issue in February 1909 until March 1910, and then was known as *Liberty* until the demise of the publication in 1912.[9]

The object of the ASU was to resist what was seen as the growing menace of socialism, particularly after two self-proclaimed socialist candidates won the Colne Valley and Jarrow by-elections of July 1907.[10] The members of the ASU were almost entirely Unionist, and men like Arbuthnot, Bull, Goulding and Rolleston were committed to the cause, and were already

Table 3
The political affiliations of Unionist members of the Conciliation Committee

Name	ASU	CUWFA	LMS	PL	TR	USRC
Arbuthnot	X		X	X	X	
Bull	X	X	X		X	X
Craig	X	X	X		X	X
Foster					X	
Goulding	X		X		X	X
Harmood-Banner	X	X				
Leverton Harris		X			X	
Henniker Heaton						
McArthur						
Ormsby-Gore					X	X
Peto						X
Randles					X	
Remnant						X
Rolleston	X	X		X	X	

ASU Anti-Socialist Union; **CUWFA** Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Association; **LMS** London Municipal Society; **PL** Primrose League; **USRC** Unionist Social Reform Committee; **TR** Tariff Reform Commission/League
Note: This table is based on written evidence that points to the person concerned being involved in the causes indicated above, but there may be some affiliations that have not been found.

involved in the fight against municipal socialism. Bull and Goulding had sat on the London County Council during the 1890s and were active members of the LMS, while Arbuthnot had debated on the political platform under the auspices of the same organisation.[11] They were also supporters of tariff reform, and believed that helping to pay for necessary social reform measures through the raising of tariffs against imports from outside the Empire was infinitely preferable to the 'socialist' idea of redistributive taxation such as that proposed by the Liberal government in the form of Lloyd George's radical 1909 budget. It was not surprising, therefore, that these men became involved in the propaganda effort

launched by the ASU shortly after its foundation, and soon afterwards considerable numbers of Unionist women joined them in their enterprise.

In the autumn of 1909 the ASU set up a school in London to train speakers to spread the anti-socialist message, and Miss J. E. Owen was appointed to run the ladies' classes. *The Anti-Socialist* claimed that 'an inaugural lecture was held when some 70 ladies were present … we hope before long to have a large and efficient brigade of trained lady workers'.[12] By the summer of 1910 around 260 women had emerged from the school 'thoroughly trained in anti-Socialist principles'. During the January general election some of these women had been deployed in northern urban areas where it was believed that socialism was rife, and had carried out 'house-to-house-visiting, kitchen talks, and drawing-room and mothers' meetings'. The next step took place on 23 June 1910, when the women's branch of the ASU was officially inaugurated at a reception in the Criterion Restaurant in London, in front of an audience which contained some prominent members of the Ladies' Grand Council of the Primrose League, including Mrs Bischoffsheim, Lady Llangattock, and Meresia Nevill, and from the CUWFA, Lady Castlereagh.[13]

The women's branch of the ASU soon instituted a social reform programme which included establishing settlements in the poorer districts of London, and starting clubs for mothers, working girls and the unemployed.[14] These measures were designed to ameliorate the impoverished social conditions that many believed were responsible for the increasing interest in socialist ideas, although there was never any question of undermining the self-reliance of the individual. Women were seen as able to cross class boundaries in their social work and therefore as the best people to foster class unity – a long-standing ideal of Conservatism.

Not all women members of the ASU supported female enfranchisement, but for women like Lady Castlereagh the need to combat socialism became a part of the argument for women's suffrage. The involvement of women in the ASU's campaign demonstrated the importance that was placed on their role as custodians of those Conservative principles that seemed to be threatened by the spread of socialist ideas. This notion of custodianship was an important part of the pro-suffrage argument put forward by Unionist women in the months leading up to the Conciliation Bill debate:

> …the bestowal of the voting power upon women might have a paramount influence in determining the future of Socialism in this country … women by nature, character and temperament are not predisposed to support novel, extreme and revolutionary schemes of

> Government, vitally affecting the whole social fabric as it exists to-day. They would rather advocate measures of orderly and moderate progress upon evolutionary, and not revolutionary, lines.[15]

Another element of the Unionist reaction to the threat of socialism was to be the formation of the Unionist Social Reform Committee (USRC) in 1911. This organisation, which was joined by five Unionist members of the Conciliation Committee – Bull, Goulding, Ormsby-Gore, Peto and Remnant – became the 'social and economic reform' arm of the anti-socialist project, and was designed to provide a Conservative answer to 'New Liberalism' by producing papers on various aspects of social policy.[16]

From the early 1900s onwards all political parties had begun to place questions of social policy much higher on the political agenda, and there was a move towards greater state intervention in the health and welfare of the population.[17] This change in direction has been noted by Jon Lawrence, who has identified an attempt by Conservatives to embrace 'a more domestic-centred political discourse' which was not just a reaction to the collectivism of the Liberal and Labour parties, but an active attempt to rethink the Conservative position on social reform.[18] In this scenario, which many in the ASU and the USRC supported, Unionist women were seen as agents of social improvement and stability, as well as enthusiastic members of the newly formed Women's Amalgamated Unionist and Tariff Reform Association (WAUTRA), which advocated an economic policy designed to benefit the kind of family most susceptible to collectivist ideas. The idea that women might help to combat the 'disease' of socialism by bringing their experience of organised philanthropy to bear on the social ills of the nation was an attractive one to these Unionist MPs, and also to the women of the CUWFA:

> Imagine … the power of the new force which would be introduced into the political arena if women were given the opportunity, by the exercise of the franchise, to influence the action of those responsible in Parliament for the measures needful to cure the ailment and so prevent the application of remedies which would be incalculably worse than the disease.[19]

Was the Conciliation Committee just one more 'league' for Unionist MPs to join?

It is not helpful to impose an arbitrary set of reasons to explain why these fourteen Unionist MPs decided to join the Conciliation Committee.

However, it is possible to draw some general conclusions about their motivations. In joining the 'legion of leagues' many of them were attempting to broaden the base of Conservative support and at the same time 'construct a defensive coalition of propertied interests on the basis of "anti-Socialism"'.[20] The membership links between these leagues has been noted in other studies; for example, in his survey of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Conservative history E. H. H. Green observed that the connection between the tariff reform campaign and the Unionist Social Reform Committee was 'part of an ongoing Conservative, anti-Socialist social reform project'.[21] The Unionist members of the Conciliation Committee supported the view that the votes of propertied women could be utilised in the fight to uphold the fundamental tenets of Conservatism – the preservation of the Church, the Constitution and the Empire were themes that appeared frequently in the publications of the ASU, just as they did in the *Primrose League Gazette* and the *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*.

The involvement of the CUWFA in the campaign for the 1910 Conciliation Bill

While the Unionists on the Conciliation Committee tried to gain the support of their colleagues in the House of Commons, the women of the CUWFA welcomed the moderate proposals contained in the Conciliation Bill, and they decided to throw their full weight behind the campaign to win parliamentary approval for the measure launched by Millicent Fawcett and the NUWSS. Violet Martin was appointed as Organising Secretary, in order to encourage the opening of new branches, and a Parliamentary Committee was formed to forge links with sympathetic Unionist MPs together under the chairmanship of Lady Castlereagh.[22] Some new members had joined the Executive Committee, including Mrs Gerald Arbuthnot, the wife of one of the members of the Conciliation Committee, the Countess of Arran, and Marion Chadwick, an active member of the Women's Amalgamated Unionist and Tariff Reform Association.[23]

Lord Lytton urged all suffrage organisations to put aside their differences and work to secure public support for the Bill, and in response the CUWFA held a number of large public meetings during the months leading up to the Conciliation Bill being presented to the House of Commons, including several at St. George's Hall, London, hosted by such prominent Conservative women as Lady Knightley, the Countess of Galloway and Lady Willoughby de Eresby. Another feature of the CUWFA's campaign were drawing-room meetings which were held all over the country for

members, friends and supporters, and during this period a number of new branches were set up as a result of the publicity that the Conciliation Bill attracted. Lady Betty Balfour, who had only just completed an extensive speaking tour on behalf of the CUWFA in November of the previous year, was an energetic campaigner, visiting branches in Bath, Bristol, Croydon, Liverpool, and several in London. Some Unionist members of the Conciliation Committee addressed meetings, including Gerald Arbuthnot and William Ormsby-Gore, the latter sharing a platform with Lord Robert Cecil at the Annual Reception of the CUWFA in London on I July 1910.[24]

There was a deliberate policy to target Unionist clubs and constituencies in order to put pressure on as many MPs as possible to vote for the Bill. Violet Martin addressed a number of Conservative Working Men's Clubs in London and the suburbs, and she had 'sympathetic' audiences at clubs in Kennington, Rotherhithe and Haggerston.[25] Lady Lockyer took the committee of the Kensington Branch to the House of Commons to put the case for women's suffrage to their two local MPs, Lord Claud Hamilton and Alan Burgoyne. They received no definite answer from the two men during the interview, but it is interesting to note that the former voted against, and the latter voted for, the second reading of the Bill.[26] The Marylebone and Paddington Branch launched a canvassing scheme, sending out over four thousand letters asking female municipal voters to indicate their support for women's suffrage. The secretary of the branch, Blanche Vesey, reported that 'a great many declarations in favour of women suffrage have been signed. Many Conservative women sign the papers without joining the Association, but these we intend to invite to meetings and we hope to induce them to become members'.[27] Speakers from other suffrage societies were invited to address meetings – Margaret Wynne Nevinson of the Women's Freedom League addressed the CUWFA branch in Hull; the co-secretary of the NUWSS, Edith Palliser, addressed the Kensington branch; Margery Corbett, a member of the NUWSS executive, spoke to Unionist suffragists in Belgravia and Chelsea.[28]

At the Women's Congress held at the Japan-British Exhibition in June 1910, a discussion on women's suffrage was held just as the second reading of the Conciliation Bill was about to take place. Mrs Emma Boulnois of the CUWFA articulated one of the main problems in persuading Conservative women to support 'the improvement in the franchise' – to make them 'understand the inwardness and seriousness of this movement'.[29] It was not surprising that upper-class women who already had a considerable degree of independence did not see an urgent need for the vote. Lady Robert Cecil reiterated the problem when she wrote to Maud Selborne that she was

pessimistic about the support of 'society women' for women's suffrage, because 'peeresses … have so much power & influence already, and those who did support the cause were 'too lazy to join any society'.[30] The appeal to aristocratic women like these was usually couched in terms of party advantage, and the Conciliation Bill, with its proposal to enfranchise only a million women, was just the kind of conservative measure that would bring useful votes to the Unionist Party while at the same time keeping adult suffrage at bay. As Harriet Packer, the editor of the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, emphasised to her readers:

> We must press home to the leaders of our Party the undoubted fact that they will have to fight Adult Suffrage very shortly; and that the best way to defeat Adult Suffrage is to give that limited measure of enfranchisement to duly-qualified women for which all the Suffrage Societies are unanimously asking, – a measure which would only enfranchise one million and a quarter women, instead of suddenly and unprecedently placing an untried body of electors in a majority.[31]

The limited basis on which Unionists believed the franchise rested was clearly spelt out in the statement of conditions under which the CUWFA demanded the parliamentary vote – '…the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association is opposed to the demand of a vote for every woman; they only ask that sex should cease to be a disqualification…'[32] In a letter to *The Morning Post*, Emily Davies, the most respected Conservative suffragist and now eighty years old, also sought to reassure those who feared that women's suffrage would be just a first step towards a much broader franchise – 'beyond the removal of the special sex disability it [the Bill] will make no change in the existing election basis, and cannot be fairly said to be a step in the direction of "one man one vote"'[33] Mrs Humphry Ward of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League identified the fear of adult suffrage as one of the main reasons why some Conservative women, misguidedly to her mind, desired the vote. She wrote to *The Times* expressing her own opposition to adult suffrage, which she believed would make women the majority of voters, and at the same time expressing contempt for the idea that the women of the CUWFA could possibly have any influence over national politics:

> …more than half their ardour for Woman Suffrage is made up of terror of adult suffrage – that is to say, of any further spread of democracy. They see … an army of Conservative and, in the main,

> well-to-do spinsters and widows blocking the way of Mr Keir Hardie and Mr Ramsay Macdonald, and turning all their revolutionary machinations to nought.[34]

The Conciliation Bill passed its first reading unopposed on 14 June, so it was now up to the suffragists to do everything in their power to persuade the government to grant the Bill further facilities.[35] Despite the fact that the campaign had to compete with national events of huge importance – the death of King Edward VII in May 1910 and the wrangle over the Parliament Bill which the Liberals had introduced in order to restrict the power of the House of Lords – a memorial asking the Prime Minister 'to afford further facilities' to the Bill was sent immediately after the first reading, and included the signatures of Lady Knightley, the Hon. Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton and Lady Strachey on behalf of the CUWFA, and a deputation from the NUWSS went to see Asquith a week later.[36] Among those present were Emily Davies, and Eleanor Sidgwick, the Principal of Newnham College, a respected member of the CUWFA, and sister of Arthur Balfour.

Lady Strachey was a strong advocate of the Conciliation Bill, and she did not mind publicly admitting that the Unionists might benefit in the polls by supporting the enfranchisement of women. She maintained that the Bill presented the ideal opportunity for Unionist leaders to take advantage of Asquith's 'hedging' by adopting women's suffrage as official party policy, and thereby claiming the loyalty of potential female voters:

> Let them once more prove that the Conservative party is the party of sane and progressive reform; let them once more earn the gratitude of a large class of voters who will not forget to whom they owe their political enfranchisement, a class moreover whose votes the very hesitation of Mr. Asquith shows he has reason to dread.[37]

Although Lady Strachey was clearly aiming her speech at Unionist MPs, her sentiments must have added to the Liberal fears that the limited franchise contained in the Conciliation Committee's proposals would only increase the Unionist vote at a time when they relied on the parliamentary support of Irish Nationalists and the Labour Party to stay in office.

The pressure put on the government by the suffrage societies must have had some effect, for although Asquith continued to remain resolutely against women's suffrage the Cabinet decided that a second reading should be given to the Conciliation Bill. It was also agreed that the Bill would be

not be granted any further facilities during that parliamentary session.[38] On 23 June Asquith announced to the House of Commons that there would be a full debate and division on the Bill on 11-12 July, and he added that because of 'the exigencies of other Parliamentary business' there would be no time for the Bill to proceed any further.[39] In a final attempt to convince both the House of Commons and the public of the justice of their cause the suffrage organisations held two successful mass demonstrations in the weeks before the Conciliation Bill was due to receive its second reading. Officially, the CUWFA did not participate in either event, but when the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies held their rally in Trafalgar Square on 9 July many Unionist women were present, and large quantities of the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review* were handed out.[40] Further pressure was put on Asquith when a memorial containing the signatures of 196 MPs supporting the Bill was forwarded to him by Lord Lytton as chairman of the Conciliation Committee. The Committee told the Prime Minister that 'in addition to these 196 members … there are over 200 others who will support it in the division lobbies', but, as had happened so often before, some promises of support were not to materialise when it came to expediting the passage of the Bill.[41]

The Unionist contribution to the Conciliation Bill debate

Several prominent Unionist women were sitting behind the grille of the Ladies' Gallery of the House of Commons on the first day of the second reading of the Parliamentary Franchise (Women) Bill on 11 July 1910. Lady Willoughby de Eresby and Alice Balfour were two members of the CUWFA present, while Mrs Austen Chamberlain and Mrs F. E. Smith were in the anti-suffragist contingent. Sir John Rolleston and Edward Goulding were the only Unionist members of the Conciliation Committee who spoke in the debate, but other Unionist MPs who participated were Arthur Balfour, Hugh Cecil and Alfred Lyttelton speaking in favour, and a longer list arguing against, including Austen Chamberlain, S. H. Butcher, Walter Long, and F. E. Smith (the future Lord Birkenhead). Balfour, Goulding and Lyttelton were suffragists of longstanding, having voted for the suffrage bill introduced by Faithfull Begg in 1897.

Rolleston seconded the motion proposed by his Labour colleague on the Conciliation Committee, David Shackleton, which asked that the Bill be read a second time. In his short speech Rolleston ignored the fact that Shackleton had indicated that what he really wished for was adult suffrage, and concentrated on what he called 'the principle that sex should not be a disqualification for the Parliamentary franchise'. He took the view that if

there were educated women who contributed to the welfare of the state, either through taxation or the production of wealth, there was no reason why they should not be entitled to the vote. Edward Goulding spoke in the same vein, putting a particular emphasis on the principle of property ownership as a qualification for enfranchisement, and making the logical argument that since, in recent years, parliament had consistently legislated to allow women to own and control more of their property, it was time to give women the voting rights that went with that ownership. His anti-socialist, anti-secular views were made apparent when he argued that the continuation of religious education in schools would be supported by enfranchised women, who had a vested interest in the maintenance of existing institutions, and in the stability of the state.[42]

Alfred Lyttelton, who had not joined the Conciliation Committee but whose wife was a member of the CUWFA, was a reluctant supporter of the Bill, as was Arthur Balfour, who was well aware of the hostility of many of his backbenchers to any idea of extending women's political power. Together with Lord Hugh Cecil, who thought that people were making too much fuss about 'putting a mark on a piece of paper', all three men put forward the pragmatic view that since women had been allowed to take such a prominent part in public life through their participation in local politics, their appointment to Royal Commissions, and their increased educational and employment opportunities, it was only right that those who were suitably qualified should be enfranchised.[43] Although Balfour continued to hold many of the views that he had expressed to the suffragette Christabel Pankhurst in 1907 – that he had no wish to 'change the present electoral arrangements of the country', and that he did not believe that there was any indication that the majority of women felt that they were suffering 'serious legislative injustices' because they did not have the vote – there were signs in his speech on the Conciliation Bill that he had been forced to concede that events had overtaken him:

> …if the future of women as women is injured by their being mixed up in political life, their cause is lost already. They are mixed up with it; they are daily more and more mixed up with it. You who oppose this Bill are yourselves urging them to mix themselves up with it. In these circumstances you cannot complain if they feel that by this exclusion under the existing law there is a hereditary slur put upon their sex. That is a policy which might have been justifiable … in times gone by, but with the development of political instincts, political institutions, and political discussions, it is tolerable no longer.[44]

The reasons that Unionist MPs gave for their support for the enfranchisement of women remained broadly the same throughout the years leading up to 1914. The attraction of using the propertied women's vote as a bulwark against socialism was one factor in attracting Unionist sympathy, but in the parliamentary debates on women's suffrage the relatively small number of Unionist MPs prepared to speak in favour of the measure preferred the argument that Balfour had put forward – that there had been advances in the position of women which meant that legislation allowing some of them the parliamentary vote could not be put off for much longer. In the Conciliation Bill debate the most common issues that Unionist suffragists touched on in their speeches are shown in table 4 below.

Table 4
The main points made in favour of women's suffrage by Unionist speakers in the 1910 Conciliation Bill debate[45]

	Women need to be able to have their special interests represented	The sphere of women's public activity already extended by the state	More women have to earn their own livings and are often the family breadwinner	Women now have property rights and pay taxes	Australia and New Zealand have set a positive example
Balfour		X	X		X
Cecil (H.)	X	X			
Goulding	X		X	X	X
Lyttelton	X	X			X
Rolleston			X		

Although the argument which linked taxation with representation was often made by the CUWFA it was not always used by these Unionist MPs. They were more inclined to focus on women householders, often widows with children, as being the most deserving of a vote. The principle of the household rather than the individual being the basis of the franchise fitted well with the Unionist belief that women's suffrage should not lead to conflict between man and wife, and enabled them to support a suffrage bill which excluded married women with a clear conscience. Balfour made a particular point of cleverly dismissing the argument for including married

women used by some Liberals (including Asquith and Churchill) to reject the Bill:

> …what are you to say of the political position in which you leave the solitary woman bread-winner? She has no vote … there is no man pointed out either by law or by custom who can represent her in the councils of the community. It seems to me that of all the classes of women who require the franchise, it is not the married woman who wants it, but the woman whom this Bill will enfranchise.[46]

This view was supported by the CUWFA on a number of occasions. In a letter sent to *The Times* shortly before the Conciliation debate they stressed that the emphasis should be placed on 'the tenets of Disraeli's Reform Act of 1867-8', which made 'the household the central electoral unit and qualification for political rights by giving the head of the household a vote'.[47] In an article in the *Review* by Lady Arnott, the President of the Irish Branch of the Association, the point is reiterated: '…a married woman has her husband, and he has a vote. Marriage is a partnership; and … the family must remain a unit'.[48]

Much of the Unionist opposition to the Bill was no different in tone to the opposition in general, and raised the same handful of objections that had dogged the question of women's suffrage from the beginning – the belief that women did not have the political understanding to vote and would be subject to their feelings rather than their intellects when it came to decision-making; the 'problem' of women not being able to physically defend their country; the idea that Britain would no longer have the respect of the Empire if she had a 'feminised' electorate; the belief that women's elevated character would be degraded; and the claim that women themselves did not want the vote. The Unionist MP Austen Chamberlain reflected much of this strand of thinking when he declared in the debate:

> In my opinion the sex of woman is a disqualification in fact, and we had better continue so to regard it in law … there is by nature a profound difference between woman and man and that … difference is of a kind to disqualify woman for the political duties which fall upon man … It is … because I place their qualities so high, because I respect them so greatly, because I think those qualities are so valuable an asset of the national life and that they cannot be maintained unimpaired in the turmoil of our political and party system, that I am reluctant to take this first step…[49]

However, as the new century progressed most of these arguments were becoming increasingly susceptible to criticism, and not only for the reasons that Balfour had suggested in his speech. Although there continued to be backbenchers who thought along the same lines as Austen Chamberlain, there was more acceptance of the idea that there was a specifically female contribution which could be beneficial to the party and the nation as a whole, and which should not be confined to local politics. A change in attitudes to women's political participation became more apparent in the years after the founding of the CUWFA in 1908 – the continuing resistance to suffrage legislation on the part of some Unionist MPs lay more in the political consequences of the change than in the change itself. For these MPs the debate was more about whether limited women's suffrage would open or shut the door to adult suffrage, than outright opposition to the actual principle. A reluctance to bring in change for change's sake had always been a part of the Conservative philosophy, but it was conceded that where there had been an alteration in society's attitude to a particular question over a period of time the law might be adjusted accordingly. An editorial in the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review* agreed with this view – 'Reforms, well-considered and just, have never been held to be contrary to the principles of the Conservative Party'.[50] It was Lord Salisbury who had told the Primrose League over twenty years before, '…the problems of the age are changing as we live … the things for which we fought when we were young no longer remain to be fought about when we are old' – the question now was whether enough Unionist backbenchers could bring themselves to agree with him.[51]

The conclusion of the debate – the Unionist vote analysed

At the end of a two-day debate the division on the Conciliation Bill produced a decisive vote in favour of the measure – 301 votes for, and 192 against (see table 5 below). Out of the total number of Unionist votes cast 43.6% were for the Bill and 56.4% were against, while the equivalent figures for the Liberals were 72.5% for and 27.5% against. Interestingly, 74.0% of Unionist MPs turned out to vote, which was the highest number since voting on the issue of the parliamentary vote for women had begun in 1867 (see Appendices).

The efforts of the Conciliation Committee and the suffrage societies had attracted a great deal of interest both inside and outside the House of Commons, and it was the first time that government parliamentary time been granted to a women's suffrage bill. Suffragette militancy had increased since the last women's suffrage bill in 1908 and was attracting the

Table 5
Voting figures in the division on the Conciliation Bill, 12 July 1910 (including tellers)[52]

	For	Against	Total voting in division	Total number of MPs
Unionists	88	114	202	273
Liberals	161	61	222	275
Irish Nationalists	20	15	35	82
Labour	32	2	34	40
Total	301	192	493	670

disapproval of many MPs, the argument over the constitutional powers of the House of Lords had clear implications for the future of any women's suffrage bill, and for Unionists the introduction of an adult suffrage bill was becoming increasingly likely and causing considerable concern. All these facts had given the issue of women's suffrage an importance that it had not had previously, and probably accounted for the substantial turnout of MPs of all parties for the Conciliation Bill debate.

The Unionist majority vote against the Conciliation Bill represented the first time that the party had voted against a women's suffrage bill since 1884 (see Appendices). Taken with the fact that it was also the occasion of the highest Unionist turnout for a women's suffrage vote, it is worth reflecting on why there was such overwhelming opposition to the Bill. As has been stated before, there had been a gradual increase in the number of Unionist MPs who were prepared to admit that women's suffrage might bring some benefits to the party and the country. In 1910 the gaining of extra votes from propertied women might have made a difference to the balance between the two main parties and offered the chance of power to the Unionists. In a letter to Lord Lytton on 21 July, W. C. Bridgeman, a Unionist MP who had voted in favour of the Bill, offered one reason why some of his colleagues might have baulked at giving their support:

> Speaking quite frankly to you … I have had great difficulty in making up my mind on this subject and I feel very much influenced by the view Balfour expressed that it is not certain that the women themselves have a majority in favour of it, and I should at any rate like time enough to be given to ascertain a little more surely the views of the women concerned

> and the passing of the second reading may draw out some more definite expression of the views of the average woman than we have yet had.[53]

Bridgeman might have added that the party had never been comfortable with parliamentary reform, despite Disraeli's 'leap in the dark', and for many Unionist MPs it was a question of timing that overrode all other considerations. With the House of Lords under threat from the Liberal government, and the prospect of a far-reaching parliamentary reform bill being introduced in the near future, they believed that it was not the right moment to vote in favour of such a controversial measure.

A reluctance on the part of both of the main parties to put the principle which the Conciliation Bill represented into practice showed itself when a further vote was taken on whether to refer the Bill to a Committee of the whole House. This would mean that no further facilities would be given to the Bill for that session. The figures for this division were very different – 322 votes for referring the Bill, and 177 against. No fewer than 124 MPs had moved from supporting the Bill to voting against it proceeding any further, and 6 MPs who had not taken any part in the first vote joined them. Sir William Bull, that staunch member of the Conciliation Committee, voted to kill the Bill, as did Arthur Balfour, while Alfred Lyttelton was absent from the second division list, so must have abstained.[54]

Although a substantial number of Liberal MPs had voted for the Bill there were several reasons which led to many of them voting against it proceeding any further. The determined opposition of Asquith, the general perception that the Conciliation proposals favoured the Unionist Party, and the seriousness of the constitutional crisis were all factors that contributed to a switch in the Liberal vote. In an analysis of the second division *The Times* noted the number of defections with apparent satisfaction, and observed that many MPs were 'unprepared to face the consequences of their first act and help to expedite the passage of the measure, the principle to which they had given their adhesion'.[55] The Unionist newspaper, *The Standard*, agreed, and summed up the general feeling of relief in the Unionist press that the Conciliation Bill had been successfully blocked by the decision to send it to a Committee of the whole House:

> …it is evident that a good many hon. Members who had inconsiderately assented to the general principle of enfranchising a limited class of women have felt bound to draw back when confronted with a definite proposal. They realise that the revolution is too formidable, and that the contemplated limitations are almost

> illusory. All credit to the politicians who have had the courage to revise their position. Nor do we believe that they will be sufferers … We have, therefore, reached the end of a spurious agitation on behalf of a measure neither cleverly drafted nor candidly promoted.[56]

The response of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association to the Conciliation Bill vote

The first reaction of the CUWFA and the other suffrage societies was to express gratification at the success of the second reading of the Conciliation Bill, and to refuse to believe that it had little chance of proceeding any further during that parliamentary session. Lady Frances Balfour, sister-in-law of Arthur Balfour, was more realistic, and relayed the details of a conversation she had had with him about the Bill to Millicent Fawcett:

> …he thought that the best speaking was against us and that he had never heard Asquith speak … with more seriousness. He understood the Cabinet had taken the matter very seriously, all the more as they were so divided. I said I believed it would make both parties put off the day of extending the franchise. He said, 'that is a very true and pertinent observation.'[57]

The doubts expressed in her letter proved to be correct. On 19 July, Lord Lytton, the Chairman of the Conciliation Committee, wrote to Asquith to ask if the Prime Minister would consider granting facilities for the Bill as soon as possible, bearing in mind that it had received a majority of 109 votes. 'In the face of these facts', wrote Lytton, 'we ask you to give the House of Commons an effective opportunity of carrying out its wishes thus emphatically expressed'.[58] In his reply Asquith reaffirmed his statement of the 23 June that the government was not able to give any further facilities to the Conciliation Bill during that session, but he revealed his true feelings about the proposed legislation when he added that any bill that was designed to address the suffrage question could not have a title 'which was so framed as to preclude a free and adequate dealing with the "whole question" '.[59] This was another clear indication that Asquith had a much wider measure of electoral reform in mind for the future.[60] The contents of the Prime Minister's letter was publicly confirmed by Lloyd George in the House of Commons on 28 July.[61]

The next day suffragist MPs continued to press Asquith on the matter, and Lord Hugh Cecil was one of the speakers who attacked the way the government had handled the Bill. He accused them of 'a lack of frankness' and declared that they had always intended to kill the Bill. He went on to

allege that they had been guilty of hypocrisy and had treated the House of Commons 'with great outward courtesy, but with essential contempt'.[62] These were forthright words, but he later confided to his sister Lady Selborne that the issue of women's suffrage was relatively unimportant to him, and his 'ultra-conservative' constituents were against it. He admitted that he supported the cause in the House of Commons 'because I do that both ostensibly and really in order to embarrass the present government'.[63] Lord Hugh Cecil's attitude was not unusual since the women's suffrage question had often been used by MPs as a political football, but the issue was never one that aroused his political passions. In the Conciliation Bill debate he had demonstrated his approach to the matter when he declared: 'I understand that a large number of women want the vote, and they seem to be quite competent to exercise it; and I cannot see why persons who are competent and who want the vote should not have it'.[64] Unlike his brother Robert, who was actively committed to the enfranchisement of women, Hugh Cecil would always be a lukewarm ally of the suffrage movement.

Despite Lloyd George's statement the non-militant suffrage societies were anxious to keep the campaign for the Conciliation Bill alive, in the hope that the measure could be revived in the autumn when Parliament returned from the summer recess. They were fearful that the WSPU, who had declared a truce during the passage of the Conciliation Bill, might consider resuming their militant activities now that the Bill had been shelved. The CUWFA, under a new President, the Countess of Selborne, faced the prospect of a delay in the implementation of the Bill with some equanimity. An editorial in the *Review* acknowledged that Lord Robert Cecil was right to suggest that it was up to the women themselves to convince the politicians of the importance of passing the measure, and it was at pains to remind its readers that the conduct of the CUWFA campaign remained staunchly faithful to the principles of Conservatism and the interests of the privileged women they were representing:

> The Conservative Party has not been in office since the question was a living one. When their turn comes, we believe that such a constitutional, such a just reform, will meet with just consideration. It is to this end that we must work, even harder than we have worked hitherto: money, time, influence – we most of us have either one or the other to give … As Unionists we should prefer to see such a great measure become law peacefully and naturally, and as the result of an ever-deepening conviction on the part of the best intellects in the state – a conviction that has been carried to their minds by the women themselves.[65]

There was no mention of the fact that Sir William Bull and Arthur Balfour had voted to effectively shelve the Bill for the rest of the parliamentary session – Unionist MPs who were prepared to speak publicly in favour of the principle of women's suffrage were few, and valuable assets to the campaign. Only Lady Betty Balfour broke ranks and took the step of resigning as Dame President of the Woking Habitation of the Primrose League, 'as a protest against the adverse vote given by Mr D. Macmaster, MP for the Chertsey Division, on the second reading of Mr Shackleton's Bill'.[66]

The CUWFA was determined to continue their work throughout the summer, despite the fact that most of their members were away on holiday. The *Review* urged supporters to use their stay at seaside resorts to reach out to those 'people whom we rarely meet or have never seen before' and recruit new members to the suffrage cause, and it suggested that copies of the *Review* could be distributed at the same time.[67] A renewed effort to secure more support for the Conciliation Bill was inaugurated by the CUWFA in the autumn, and was designed to coincide with the opening of a new parliamentary session in November. The Association wrote to all those Unionist MPs who had voted or paired in favour of the Conciliation Bill, and asked them to sign a petition to the Prime Minister asking for further facilities for the Bill during the coming session. Lady Selborne also sent a letter to every MP who had voted for the Bill, outlining the arguments for women's suffrage on behalf of the CUWFA.[68]

Lady Betty Balfour continued to be one of the busiest campaigners on their behalf. She produced a pamphlet after the Conciliation debate which identified and replied to the 'well-worn' arguments against the Bill one by one, and during the autumn she spoke on behalf of the Association at meetings all over the country, visiting Kendal, Southport, Penzance, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Worcester, and Dublin, to urge Unionist women to carry on the fight.[69] The number of local branches were growing steadily – by the end of the year more than 20 were reporting their activities to the *Review*.[70] The CUWFA continued to maintain links with the NUWSS at national and local level – for example, Lady Betty Balfour's local branch in Woking, Surrey, joined with the NUWSS in a county suffrage demonstration in Guildford in October, and in Warwick and Leamington the local CUWFA and NUWSS groups distributed leaflets on the suffrage question together. The two societies held a joint meeting in Bristol in December, when Lord Lytton was one of the speakers, and copies of the *Review* were sold in the NUWSS shop in Bristol.[71] At a national level the CUWFA took part in 'Suffrage Week', held from 7-12 November, when they hosted a large public meeting at the St James's Theatre in London at

which the author and suffragist John Buchan spoke, and later that week they took part in a huge demonstration at the Albert Hall organised by the NUWSS.[72]

The response of the CUWFA to the return of militancy and a renewed fight for the Conciliation Bill

Parliament assembled for the new session on 18 November 1910, and immediately Asquith announced that since the constitutional crisis had not been resolved during the summer he intended to call a general election to obtain a mandate for the reform of the House of Lords. On the same day, the WSPU, in the belief that the Conciliation Bill would now be delayed indefinitely, announced an end to their truce and tried to 'rush' the House of Commons.[73] This militant protest became known as 'Black Friday', because of the force used by the police against the demonstrators, and by the evening 115 women had been arrested, although the charges against most of them were later withdrawn. While the disturbances were going on outside the pro-suffrage Unionist MP, Viscount Castlereagh, tried to move an amendment to force Asquith to declare what he intended to do about the Conciliation Bill.[74] Asquith refused to answer, but on 22 November he returned to the House of Commons and promised that, if re-elected, the government would 'give facilities in the next Parliament for effectively proceeding with a Bill which is so framed as to admit of free amendment'.[75]

This announcement caused the suffrage societies some uneasiness. Firstly, it was deliberately vague about when such a bill would be given parliamentary time, and secondly, the feeling was that any reform proposed would be so wide that it would never receive enough support in both Houses of Parliament. The following day 200 members of the WSPU marched to Downing Street in protest and many of them were arrested as a result of the ensuing disturbances.[76] However, the non-militant societies believed that Asquith's statement had had one positive effect – it had placed the question of women's suffrage on the agenda just before the general election.[77] Although they hoped the suffrage cause would benefit from this fact the women of the CUWFA were realistic about the political priorities of the electorate but rather too idealistic about what would happen if the Unionists won the election. An editorial in the *Review* observed:

> It is an impossible task to divert the voting energies of the electors during an election from the contentious matters at stake between the two great Parties: while on the other hand the elector is generally quite

> willing to think over questions that are unconnected with the direct party controversies in a reasonable and unprejudiced manner…[78]

The hope that a newly elected Unionist Party might enact the Conciliation Bill was, according to Lord Lytton, an unlikely proposition. In a letter to Lady Isabel Margesson, a member of the WSPU, Lytton observed that if the parties were equally split the Conciliation Bill would be 'the only one which would stand a chance of passing the House of Commons. If the Conservatives have a majority, we have no pledge at all and the situation will be an altogether new one'. He also warned Lady Margesson that 'conciliation and militancy cannot go side by side and until a truce is again declared there can be no more Conciliation Committee'.[79]

The violence that had taken place on 'Black Friday' and the following week resurrected the debate within the CUWFA about the rights and wrongs of militancy. Only a few days before the event Lady Robert Cecil had written to Maud Selborne anticipating the WSPU protest, and revealing the sympathy that some of her fellow members of the Executive Committee of the CUWFA had for the actions of the militants:

> …I shan't resign for the present because at least I am a non-militant & some of them are very wobbly on that point I believe. Sarah Bailey [another member of the Committee] and I had the greatest difficulty last year in screwing them up to protest against actual violence … as the militants will probably do something very silly if the Conciliation Bill is lost, we may have a job to keep our lot steady. They will not understand that you can't be constitutional & unconstitutional at the same time…[80]

The sympathy of some on the Executive Committee was not surprising, since Lady Betty Balfour's sister, Constance Lytton, had been imprisoned and forcibly fed in Walton Gaol, Liverpool, earlier that year. Betty Balfour had been fiercely supportive of her sister despite her own non-militant stance, and their brother, Lord Lytton, shared the frustration of many women with the Liberal government. Shortly before Parliament had assembled on 18 November Lytton had told the Prime Minister that women

> …had done enough to prove their zeal, and more than enough to merit the attention of a Government. If after a Constitutional movement, incessant since 1868, and particularly vigorous during the past five years, they still can fail in the modest demand which they

> make on the time of Parliament, it cannot be a matter for surprise that some among them should turn to other methods of agitation.[81]

There is no doubt that some members of the CUWFA, the NUWSS and the other suffrage societies admired the courage of those who risked imprisonment for their beliefs, but as the militant activities increased in ferocity over the next three years the WSPU began to be seen as a serious liability to the women's suffrage cause.

The women of the CUWFA braced themselves for the second general election in a year, and devoted their efforts to persuading as many Unionist candidates as possible to pledge themselves to supporting the Conciliation Bill in the next parliamentary session. They were encouraged by the fact that once again the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations had voted in favour of women's suffrage at their annual meeting in Nottingham in November, and they believed that they were slowly increasing their parliamentary support. In a somewhat over-optimistic rallying call to readers, the *Review* chose to emphasise the desire of Unionist women to support their MPs in the defence of Conservative principles by becoming enfranchised, rather than suggesting that the women wanted the vote primarily for the benefit of their own sex:

> We believe that the number of our supporters in the Conservative Party is increasing day by day. Many candidates have openly declared for us, and the Agents and Chairmen of Committees are coming out strongly on our side. We have done valuable work in certain constituencies where we could rely on the soundness of the Candidates' views … the Conservative Party are not guilty of any broken promises to the women of the country, and thatwe intend to assist them in defending the Constitution and the Empire, believing that, when they have the chance they will be prepared to carry out the pledges they have six times formally adopted through their Associations, in favour of placing women who are qualified for the Municipal vote upon the Parliamentary register.[82]

7

THE ROLE OF CONSERVATIVE SUFFRAGISTS IN THE 1911-1914 WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN

The introduction of a new Conciliation Bill in 1911

The Liberals were returned to power in the December 1910 general election with very little change in the relative strength of the parties.[1] A special Executive Committee meeting of the CUWFA had decided that 'our Branches should each work for their local candidates provided they were in favour of Women's Suffrage …' Letters had been sent to each Unionist candidate 'begging those who had supported us before to continue to do so, and asking the new candidates their views', and when the election was over further letters were sent to successful supporters congratulating them on their victory.[2] However, despite the work of the CUWFA and the other suffrage societies before the general election, the *Anti-Suffrage Review* of January 1911 was able to point out that only 100 out of 1,200 election addresses published by parliamentary candidates had mentioned women's suffrage – the constitutional question had dominated the political debate.[3]

The Liberal MP Sir George Kemp (a manufacturer who had resigned from the Unionist coalition on the issue of Free Trade), was persuaded to introduce a second Conciliation Bill. Because of criticism of the earlier bill some of the details had been changed. The £10 occupation qualification had been dropped leaving only a household qualification, and to address the 'faggot' vote it was decided that husband and wife could not register in the same parliamentary borough or county. The wording of the title of the Bill was changed so that it would be possible to amend it in committee.[4] The Conciliation Committee issued an explanatory memorandum which was designed to reassure MPs of all parties:

> A settlement is possible only on a basis of compromise … Such a compromise must meet the objections of Ministerialists to any increase of the ownership or plural vote. It must also satisfy Unionists as a cautious and moderate advance … The Bill as it now stands is a proposal to confer the parliamentary vote upon women householders, who number in the three kingdoms about one million persons … They are rated and taxed. They are subject to the same liabilities and fulfil the same obligations as male citizens … The Bill expressly provides that marriage shall not disqualify. If comparatively few married women will be qualified, it is only because they are rarely ratepayers or householders in their own right. An appreciable number, however, will be qualified.

The memorandum was also at pains to address the criticisms that the Bill was 'a proposal to confer "votes on ladies" ', and it used the much-quoted results of a house-to-house enquiry which had been conducted in 1905 by the ILP to argue that this was not the case. The survey had concluded that of the female voters on the municipal roll in fifty selected districts in England 82% were working-class women. The results of a recent canvass which had been conducted at the beginning of 1911 in Dundee, Bangor and Carnarvon (now Caernarfon) revealed that, under the terms of the new Conciliation Bill, working-class women would constitute 89.1% of enfranchised women.[5] How accurate these surveys were is hard to assess, since they depended on the samples being representative of the female local government electorate all over the country; however, these figures were never seriously challenged by opponents of the Conciliation Bill.

By the spring of 1911 there were 47 MPs on the Conciliation Committee, which was made up of 22 Liberals, 14 Unionists, 6 Irish Nationalists and 5 Labour Party representatives.[6] The Unionist MPs Bull, Craig, Goulding, Harmood-Banner, Ormsby-Gore, Peto, Remnant and Rolleston continued to serve, but Arbuthnot, Foster, Leverton Harris, Henniker Heaton and Randles had lost their seats, and Charles MacArthur had died. The six men that replaced them came from similar backgrounds to the existing Unionist members, and some were close colleagues – Hugh Barrie, a businessman and MP for North Londonderry; Charles Goldman, a mining expert who had fought in the South African War, was a member of the National Service League and the Unionist Social Reform Committee whose wife was on the Women's Council of the CUWFA; Edward Marshall Hall, the famous King's Counsel; Harry Hope, an agricultural expert who had visited Australia and New Zealand and had experienced the effects of

female enfranchisement in those countries; Viscount Lewisham, the son of the Earl of Dartmouth and a member of the LCC; and George Touche, a senior partner in a firm of chartered accountants.[7] Later that year several more Unionist MPs joined the Committee – James Agg-Gardner, a member of the Grand Council of the Primrose League and a champion of female education; Colonel Charles Burn, who had served in India and South Africa; Lord Robert Cecil, the new MP for Hitchin after a recent by-election; Arthur Fell, a New Zealander who had written extensively on the subject of tariff reform; William Mitchell-Thomson, a lawyer, businessman, and one of the three Irish Unionist MPs on the Committee; Samuel Roberts, a barrister and former Lord Mayor of Sheffield; and Viscount Wolmer, the eldest son of the Earl and Countess of Selborne and nephew of Lord Robert Cecil, who must have been influenced by the Hotel Cecil's support for women's suffrage.[8] Agg-Gardner, Cecil, Fell, Roberts, Mitchell-Thomson, Touche and Wolmer were already or became Honorary Vice-Presidents of the CUWFA.

With the exception of the elderly Agg-Gardner these new members of the Conciliation Committee were comparatively inexperienced MPs, most of them having won their seats in the general elections of 1910, when the House of Commons had seen a considerable increase in Unionist representation after the losses of 1906. Apart from the aristocratic Viscounts Lewisham and Wolmer, who, like Ormsby-Gore, were young and just beginning their political careers, the new recruits were either businessmen or members of the professions (a third had legal training), and several had gained first-hand experience of the British Empire either as soldiers or because of their commercial interests. As the previous chapter has indicated, many of these men were from the affluent upper middle-class, with considerable experience of life outside Westminster and often involved in local government. They had grown up during a period where the women in their families would have benefited from the improvement in women's legal rights and access to higher education, and the increased opportunities to participate in political life. All these factors may have contributed to the reasons why this group of Unionist MPs were prepared to play an active role in securing female enfranchisement, but it is also likely that they joined the Conciliation Committee because it was becoming clear that the Liberal government would have to deal with the women's suffrage issue in the near future, and the limited Conciliation Bill proposal would be of the most benefit to the Unionist Party.

On 9 February 1911 a successful first reading of the Conciliation Bill took place, and a second reading was scheduled for 5 May. All the

constitutional suffrage societies set to work to win support for the measure, liaising closely with the Conciliation Committee, and the WSPU agreed to cease their militant activities during the progress of the Bill. Louise Gilbert Samuel, the Honorary Secretary of the CUWFA, reported that they had written to all the Unionist pro-suffrage MPs asking for their support:

> We have now seventy-five members in the House on whom we can rely, but there are many 'wobblers' and neutrals, on whom every influence possible should be brought to bear before May 5th … Even if some of these gentlemen could be persuaded to abstain from voting it would be of great advantage. I should be pleased to give a list of unreliable and uncertain M.P.s to any of our readers who think they could assist in any way by writing or interviewing such Members.[9]

Branches of the CUWFA kept up their campaigning during the spring months, and some of them made a point of targeting their local Conservative Clubs in the hope that pressure might be brought to bear on influential grass-roots members of the party. In Bristol a women's suffrage debate was held at the Men's Junior Conservative Club at Redland, while the Cheltenham branch, which now had over 90 members, held a meeting at the local Conservative Club, at which the speakers were the man about to become the local MP once again, James Agg-Gardner, and the secretary of the Cheltenham branch of the Primrose League. The Cheltenham meeting was attended by various local dignitaries, including a councillor who summed up the main thrust of the CUWFA argument for female enfranchisement when he declared 'there was a strong Conservative strain in women and the extension of the franchise to them would be a great benefit to the Conservative party, though it was not for that reason he advocated it, but on the broad grounds of justice and the public welfare.'[10]

In response to the call by to obtain the support of local City and Town Councils, the Liverpool branch of the CUWFA joined together with the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society to write to all the Unionist members of the City Council, urging them to support a motion in favour of women's suffrage. The resolution, introduced by an Independent member, Eleanor Rathbone, was passed by 44 votes to 19.[11] Other branches of the CUWFA were not so successful when they approached their local councils. The Croydon branch, together with the other suffrage societies, sent a deputation to the County Council 'praying them to put forward a resolution to Parliament asking for facilities for the Woman's Suffrage Bill'. They reported that 'the resolution was not passed owing to a technical

difficulty raised by one of our opponents on the Council'. The East Dorset branch of the CUWFA had a similar experience:

> We tried to induce the Poole Town Council to pass a resolution in favour of the Conciliation Bill, and presented three petitions of women ratepayers, earnestly requesting the Council to pass the resolution, and 22 Councillors signed a petition urging the Mayor to allow the resolution to be on the agenda. To our astonishment, the women's petitions were kept back, the Mayor made the matter a personal one, and in spite of the loyalty of a few friends on the Council the meeting was adjourned and the question was thus stifled and defeated.[12]

Three of the CUWFA's London branches met with the same negative response when they approached their local Borough Councils. The Chelsea branch, together with seven members of other local suffrage organisations, visited Chelsea Borough Council to ask them 'to petition Parliament for facilities for the Conciliation Bill'. The group was received but their request 'was not acceded to'. The Kensington branch joined with eight other suffrage societies to send a deputation of women rate-payers to see the Mayor and councillors of Kensington to ask them to pass a resolution in support of the Conciliation Bill. Lady Helen Craggs reported to the *Review* that 'the deputation was received, but the Council voted against sending a petition to Parliament'. The Marylebone and Paddington branch sent deputations to both Borough Councils, but Marylebone refused to see the women and Paddington, after discussing the question, could not vote on the matter because there was no quorum present. The members of the suburban Streatham branch were more successful with their approach to Lambeth Borough Council. The letters they sent to councillors urging them to support a motion in favour of women's suffrage produced a successful vote, with 35 votes in favour and 4 against.[13]

The *Review* was able to report that thirty-eight Town Councils, mostly representing cities and towns in Scotland, Ireland and the North of England, had passed similar resolutions by April 1911.[14] In places like Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hull, Liverpool, Penryn, Southport and West Bromwich, the joint efforts by suffrage societies to persuade local councillors to publicly support the suffrage cause must have been helped by a strong CUWFA presence, either through an active branch or a Unionist MP on the Conciliation Committee.[15] The London suffrage societies had encountered more problems because of the strength of party divisions in the

capital – by 1909 the LCC and the vast majority of borough councils were dominated by the Unionists and they reflected the same anti-suffragist tendencies that their backbenchers displayed in the House of Commons. In addition, the militant activities that had taken place in the city towards the end of 1910 had not helped to endear the suffrage cause to Londoners.[16] Another factor that led to the refusal of some councils to consider a resolution was the belief that it was not part of their business to become involved in the women's suffrage issue.[17]

The CUWFA's branches had never worked harder than in the weeks just before the Conciliation Bill debate was due to take place. The Woking branch, led by the energetic Lady Betty Balfour, carried out a house-to-house canvass in an attempt to increase their membership, and also tried to attract the support of working women by holding Women Suffrage Teas in local schools. The Woking branches of the NUWSS and the CUWFA joined together to send a deputation to see their anti-suffragist MP Donald Macmaster the day before the Conciliation Bill debate, but failed to persuade him to change his mind and pledge his vote in favour of the measure.[18] A representative of the NUWSS joined delegates from the Cheltenham branch of the CUWFA on an equally unsuccessful deputation to their local Unionist MP for the Tewkesbury division, Michael Hicks-Beach, but members of the Liverpool branch were heartened by their visit to the Unionist by-election candidate for the Bootle division, Andrew Bonar Law, who promised that he would support the Conciliation Bill if elected.[19]

The London branches of the CUWFA had formed a new London Committee, with organising powers for the whole of the capital, and this resulted in a number of well-attended meetings in the run-up to the introduction of the Bill. Lady Knightley, Lady Rayleigh and Lady Willoughby de Broke were the hostesses at three large and successful meetings at the Curzon Hotel, where the speakers included Lord Robert Cecil, Charles Goldman MP from the Conciliation Committee, and Nina Boyle, who was a visitor from the Johannesburg Women's Suffrage Society in South Africa. A crowded public meeting was held at the Hotel Cecil on 9 March, at which Lady Betty Balfour and the Earl of Selborne were the chief speakers and Lord Lytton was in the chair.[20] Selborne's speech was subsequently printed in the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review* and in the anti-suffrage Unionist periodical *The National Review*, which prefaced the article with the following scornful remarks:

> …it is alleged that Lord Selborne is the victim of a cruel boycott whenever he speaks on Woman's Suffrage – the inference being that

> the opponents of that policy are terrified of his arguments. As we are no parties to any conspiracy of silence, and have not the ghost of a shadow of a fear of any case that may be made for the establishment of Petticoat Government in this country, we gladly reproduce … the speech delivered by Lord Selborne to a body entitled "The Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association".

The editor, Leo Maxse, went on to severely criticise the CUWFA for declaring that they would not work for any Unionist parliamentary candidate who was against women's suffrage.[21] His condemnation of the CUWFA was unusual – Unionist anti-suffragists rarely expressed their views about the Association's activities in such a public manner. However, Maxse's remarks probably did reflect the hostility that some male Unionists must have felt about the very existence of an organisation which called itself 'Conservative', but was prepared to put suffrage before party during a general election.

Perhaps taking a lead from Balfour's declaring an interest in the idea of a referendum on tariff reform shortly before the general election, the anti-suffragists took the opportunity to suggest to Asquith that the Bill might be the ideal subject for a national referendum.[22] The Prime Minister did not like the idea – not only was there no precedent for referenda under the British constitution, but he knew that because the electorate was male any referendum could never be said to reflect the true feelings of the whole population.[23] The suffrage societies agreed with Asquith on this occasion, and they also believed that the majority of the electorate would vote to retain the 'status quo' on constitutional questions. However, the referendum had its supporters in the suffrage movement, particularly among Unionists. The keenest supporter of the referendum as a way of deciding major constitutional questions was the suffragist Earl of Selborne, who had become interested in the idea after his father-in-law, Lord Salisbury, had suggested that when dealing with a contentious issue like Irish Home Rule the House of Lords might have to go over the head of the Commons and appeal to the country to decide the matter.[24] Lord Hugh Cecil advocated the holding of a referendum on constitutional questions 'of the highest importance' for similar reasons, so it was not surprising that the suggestion that a referendum should be held on the issue of women's enfranchisement was to be made frequently over the next few years, particularly at times when it seemed impossible to find a solution to the problem.[25] The leaders of the main political parties held opposing views on the suffrage question but both frequently asked, perhaps as a way of putting

off the inevitable, 'what evidence is there … that this measure is desired by the majority of the women, or by the majority of the electorate?'[26] Some believed that a referendum might provide the answer.

The 1911 Conciliation Bill debate and its aftermath

The front benches were empty when the debate began on 5 May 1911 – Balfour had paired in favour of the Bill and was away. Lord Hugh Cecil observed: 'From the appearance of the Front Benches it would seem that the Olympians have determined to leave the contest and to let the Greeks and the Trojans fight it out themselves.'[27] Arthur Lyttelton, who had spoken in the 1910 Conciliation Bill debate, revealed the Unionist strategy in a letter written to Millicent Fawcett on 1 May:

> …I shd have no difficulty in making another speech for what it is worth. But the effect of it wd be to provoke (this I have ascertained) a reply from either A. Chamberlain or W. Long – & a … duel wd take place on the Govt Front Bench making in all 4 speeches from the two F. benches … On the whole therefore it seems best to close with the offer that no one shd speak either for or against on our Front Bench. I speak with a reserve … because I admit that I shd prefer another year to elapse before again addressing the House on this subject.[28]

There is a diffidence in Lyttelton's letter that may have been due to a tiredness with the predictability and intransigence of the arguments, and the fact that the Conciliation Bill was to be debated just before the third reading of the controversial Parliament Act on 15 May. There was so much contentious legislation to be discussed during the parliamentary session that the suffrage societies were concerned that no further facilities would be afforded the Bill, even if it passed its second reading.

As in the previous Conciliation Bill debate the Unionist and Conciliation Committee member Edward Goulding spoke in favour of the legislation. He rehearsed the usual pragmatic arguments for women's suffrage, and most of the justications were the same as before. Lord Hugh Cecil also spoke in favour, but the only other Unionist speakers were against the measure. Most of the contributions to the debate came from the Labour and Irish Nationalist parties. The Labour MP Arthur Henderson supported the Bill but he warned that his party had 'apprehensions as to the consequences' of the legislation: 'We are apprehensive that the power this Bill will confer should it become law will be used by those who are enfranchised by it to prevent the enfranchisement of the greater number of

the sex…' He quoted from two recent speeches given by members of Women's Unionist Associations to prove his point:

> This is a speech that was made by a lady speaker at a meeting of the Glasgow Women's Unionist Association. "They were not asking that every woman should have the franchise. Neither did they approve of adult suffrage. The franchise was too low already and the granting of the suffrage to qualified women was … the best bulwark against adult suffrage that could be desired." Here is a quotation from a speaker at a Unionist Women's meeting at Bolton. "Her opinion was that if they granted to women what they wanted in this Conciliation Bill it would keep back adult suffrage for at least fifty years."[29]

It was clear from Henderson's remarks that the Conciliation Committee continued to suffer from the widespread perception that it was supporting legislation that favoured the Unionist Party at a time when the Liberals were talking about a substantial enlargement of the electorate, and the Labour Party was committed to adult suffrage. Although the early conferences of the Labour Representation Committee (the LRC was known as the Labour Party from 1906) had supported resolutions in favour of equal voting rights for women, the issue was always controversial, and there was an increasing demand that adult suffrage should be made the priority.[30] Henderson was right when he claimed in his speech that the CUWFA hoped that a limited measure of enfranchisement would be a barrier to adult suffrage, and his view was shared by successive Labour Party conferences from 1905 to 1909. These conferences saw the adult suffragists defeat the women's suffrage resolutions by arguing that they were a retrograde step which would be bound to increase the power of the propertied classes. However, a concession was made to supporters of female enfranchisement, when, at the annual conference of 1910, a resolution was passed which stated that any Reform Bill which excluded women would be opposed by 'organised labour'.[31] The fears of the majority of Unionist backbenchers were amply confirmed by the closing words of Henderson's contribution to the Conciliation Bill debate, which warned that 'we shall seek to extend the measure in the only consistent and logical direction that we ought to go, namely, the recognition of the claim of all women to have a vote . . .'[32]

At the end of a comparatively short debate on the Bill there was a division, and 257 MPs voted for the measure, while only 91 voted against it (see table 6 below). It appeared to be an overwhelming victory, but only 348 members had cast a vote compared to 493 for the 1910 Bill, and the

number of Unionist MPs present was low – only 108 compared to 202 in 1910. Out of the total number of Unionist votes cast 57.4% were for the Bill and 42.6% were against it. The equivalent figures for the Liberals were 78.8% for and 21.2% against (see Appendices for an analysis of the figures for all the parties).

Table 6
Voting figures in the division on the Conciliation Bill, 5 May 1911 (including tellers)[33]

	For	Against	Total voting in division	Total number of MPs
Unionists	62	46	108	274
Liberals	134	36	170	270
Irish Nationalists	34	9	43	84
Labour	27	0	27	42
Total	257	91	348	670

This time there was a Unionist majority in favour of a Conciliation Bill, but only 39.4% of Unionist MPs had voted in the division, compared to 74% in 1910. Balfour and most of his front bench had paired for the Bill and did not attend the debate, and, according to the NUWSS, there were 40 Unionists among the 108 MPs thought to be in favour of women's suffrage who did not vote or pair at all.[34] After the result of the division was announced the Bill was referred to a Committee of the whole House – a clear indication that the measure would not be granted further facilities that session.[35]

Although the Bill had been successful there was a general feeling that it had not been treated seriously, and the reduced numbers in the House of Commons seemed to confirm this suspicion.[36] This view was supported by a leading article in the Unionist newspaper, *The Globe*, which was published on the day after the debate. The author argued that the women's suffrage movement was making little progress in winning support for their cause from the rest of the female population and went on to assert that ' … it is open to question whether it has not reached, if it has not actually passed, its high-water mark…[37] On the same day the Unionist *Pall Mall Gazette*, who must have noted the remarks of Arthur Henderson, suggested an important reason why Unionist MPs should be cautious before supporting the idea of enfranchising women:

> In these times it is more necessary than ever to keep out the thin end of the wedge … Unionists who are deluded into voting for this Bill in the belief that their party would immediately gain by it must reckon with the certainty that, if that proved to be so, the other side would for that very reason drive he thick end in as soon as possible in the chance of bettering their own prospects.[38]

The dilemma for those Unionist MPs who were inclined to support women's enfranchisement was – would it stave off the introduction of adult suffrage as Arthur Henderson had suggested it might, or would it open the door wide enough to allow the Liberals to bring it in? The Parliament Act, if passed, would curtail the power of the House of Lords to prevent any radical widening of the franchise, so it was not surprising that, despite the favourable vote, some Unionists were beginning to retreat from their formerly sympathetic positions towards women's suffrage.

During May the Conciliation Committee and the suffrage societies put intense pressure on the government to make an announcement about the future of the Conciliation Bill. Shortly after the debate Lord Robert Cecil wrote to *The Times* urging Asquith to provide further facilities for the measure:

> Mr Asquith has pledged himself that the Bill shall have facilities during this Parliament. Everyone knows that it is inconceivable that that any better opportunity than the present will be found for giving effect to that pledge. Will the Government act up to their promises, or are we to be met by further evasions?[39]

Asquith and his ministers took some time to agree on the future of the Bill, but on 29 May Lloyd George announced to the House of Commons that Asquith's pledge of 22 November 1910 which had stated that the government would give facilities to the Bill in the next Parliament if it was 'so framed as to admit of free amendment' still stood. The Bill had satisfied this test, but because of pressure of business it would have to wait until the next session before it could be heard again, at which time the government would allot a week for its further stages, provided that it had 'been again read a second time'.[40] In response to expressions of concern from the suffrage societies Lord Lytton wrote to Asquith to seek confirmation that there would be enough time in the next session to see the Bill through to its conclusion. He was reassured by the Prime Minister's letter of reply which stated that: 'The Government, though divided in opinion on the merits of the Bill, are unanimous in their determination to give effect, not

only in the letter but in the spirit, to the promise in regard to facilities which I made on their behalf before the last general election'.[41] Asquith's words reassured the women of the CUWFA, and in a leading article in the *Review* Harriet Packer observed, perhaps naively, 'the fact remains that the most respected Ministers are making serious pledges on the subject of Women's Franchise – a subject to which, a few short years since, was granted the silence of disdain'.[42]

The response of the CUWFA to the renewed campaign for the Conciliation Bill

Despite continuing accusations to the contrary the suffrage societies believed that they had more than adequately demonstrated the desire of a large number of women to be enfranchised, and to prove the strength of support for their cause they announced that there would be a joint demonstration in London on 17 June. The event was a great success, and was attended by an estimated 40,000 women, who marched in procession from the Embankment to the Albert Hall.[43] For the first time the CUWFA was officially represented in a mass demonstration, and the part played by the Unionist women was described in the *Review*:

> Our contingent proved most successful and enthusiastic in every respect. Our banners made a brilliant display, and many of our branches were well represented. Our Kensington, Belgravia and Chelsea , Marylebone and Paddington, Bristol, Woking, Liverpool, East Dorset. Warwickshire, Hull and Croydon branches all contributed beautiful banners, and many members of our Executive and Council walked under the banner of the Central Office … All our members wore the colours of the Association, carrying pennants and bouquets of flowers.[44]

Individual branches that had taken part in the procession contributed reports to the *Review*, and revealed the genuine enthusiasm of the women participating in what must have been an impressive spectacle. The Chelsea and Belgravia branch had had a special banner made by the Suffrage Atelier, a group of women artists who designed posters and banners for the cause.[45] The group's secretary, Helen Dowding, described it in her report as having 'blue scrolls and gilt lettering on a white silk ground, with our badge worked in the centre'. About 20 members of the Warwick and Leamington branch journeyed to London to take part in the event, with Lady Willoughby de Broke at the head of their contingent under the banner that

she had contributed specially for the occasion.[46] Lady Knightley was not involved in the demonstration, but she witnessed it as she reurned home after trying on her Coronation robes. Her journal entry for the same day was optimistic:

> …I was held up at Hyde Park Corner by an enormous suffrage procession. I think it must have been the biggest ever held. I suppose I ought to have been walking in it, but I think I done my share. It really seems as if there were a chance of its getting through the House of Commons next year.[47]

The women of the CUWFA had joined a demonstration in which there was a preponderance of upper and middle class women, so they felt at home walking alongside the other groups that took part, the largest of which was led by Millicent Fawcett and the NUWSS. In a long and detailed report of the event *The Times* noted the presence of 'women of every class and society … Mainly, however, they were women of assured circumstances … Politics of all shades had contingents'.[48]

Over the following months the suffrage societies worked together with the Conciliation Committee to gather support for the Conciliation Bill, which was unlikely to be heard before 1912. In an editorial for the *Review* Lord Robert Cecil claimed that 'never has the cause stood so well as it stands now … Our task between now and next spring is to take care that every member of the House of Commons, over whom we have the slightest influence, shall have brought home to him thoroughly and completely the case for the Suffrage, and the importance of passing this Bill into law'. He rejected the calls for women married to qualified voters to be included in the Bill by arguing that it would 'facilitate the advent of Adult Suffrage', and he reassured any worried readers that seeking the franchise for those women 'who if they were men, would have the right to vote' was 'an intelligible principle and one which we can defend.[49] However, there was little in the political situation to justify Cecil's optimism, despite the successful Conciliation Bill vote. In August 1911 the House of Lords' veto was abolished when the Parliament Act was passed, and the government's attention immediately turned to thoughts of the crowded parliamentary programme ahead, which would be dominated by the thorny issues of Irish Home Rule, Welsh disestablishment, and the National Insurance Bill. The question of women's suffrage continued to cause divisions within Asquith's cabinet and the Liberal Party as a whole, and Lloyd George was becoming increasingly concerned that the Conciliation bill was too narrow and if

successful would 'add hundreds of thousands of votes throughout the country to the strength of the Tory Party'.[50]

As they had done the previous year the CUWFA groups arranged numerous meetings designed to generate enthusiasm for the Bill, and to increase membership. Lady Willoughby de Broke was one of the most energetic participants in the campaign, and was present at a series of events held in her home county of Warwickshire. On 13 July she held an 'At Home' to raise money for a paid organiser to visit local women municipal electors and persuade them to sign petitions which would be sent to local MPs asking them to vote for the Conciliation Bill. Later that month the Warwick and Leamington group joined with other suffrage societies to hold a successful demonstration in Stratford-on-Avon at which the women 'marched in a procession through the principal streets, headed by a band', and the Countess of Selborne and Lady Willoughby de Broke were among those who spoke from platforms to a 'large and interested audience'. This impressive occasion was followed in September by a more down-to-earth event when a 'Garden Meeting' attended 'mainly by farmers' and labourers' wives' (who would not have qualified for the vote under the terms of the Conciliation Bill) was held in the village of Combroke. Once again, Lady Willoughby de Broke was the main speaker, and according to a report in the *Review* the women 'showed much intelligent interest in conversation afterwards, and several joined as associates'. In addition to these events numerous drawing-room meetings were held which attracted many new members, and a joint meeting with the NUWSS, the WSPU and the Church League for Women's Suffrage took place in early November, at which the speakers were Lord Lytton and Margaret Ashton of the NUWSS.[51]

Other CUWFA groups organised public events in support of the Conciliation Bill during the summer and autumn of 1911 – a meeting of the Droitwich group was attended by 200 people who heard an address by Lady Betty Balfour; the Marylebone and Paddington group held a 'Garden Meeting' hosted by Lord and Lady Robert Cecil at which a large audience heard Emily Davies, now over 80 years old, speak on the suffrage question; Lord Robert Cecil spoke to crowded halls in Bath and Cheltenham; and the militant suffragette Lady Constance Lytton chaired a meeting organised by the Stevenage group at which several new members were recruited. Streatham, Balham and Clapham group joined with Balham Conservative Association and the local Primrose League habitation (despite the prohibition on them entering into 'contentious politics') to hold a reception for their Unionist MP, at which a resolution in favour of the vote for women householders was debated and 'carried with but one dissentient'. The *Review*

recorded that 'many prominent Conservatives of Balham expressed the warmest sympathy with the movement and Primrose League ladies joined as members'. Although no specific figures are given in the *Review*, the growth in the number and membership of CUWFA groups led to the employment of four new organising secretaries during 1911, and this, together with the interest shown by local Conservative Associations and the consistently pro-suffrage vote at the conferences of the National Union, seemed to indicate an increasing body of support for the enfranchisement of women among Unionists who lived beyond the narrow environs of Westminster (see Appendices for the growth in number of groups).[52]

The CUWFA and the Reform Bill proposal

The suffrage societies' campaign for the Conciliation Bill was well under way when, on 7 November 1911, Asquith announced his Government's intention 'to introduce into Parliament next Session a measure providing for one man one vote. This … will be drafted in such a form that if the House of Commons so decides, it may be extended to confer the franchise upon women'.[53] Suffragists were shocked by Asquith's unexpected statement and their first instinct was anger 'that the Government had met the powerful and widespread agitation in the country for the enfranchisement of women by the promise of a Bill dealing only with the male franchise'.[54] On 17 November a deputation from all the suffrage societies went to see Asquith to obtain more information about the proposed legislation. The CUWFA sent the Countess of Selborne, Lady Betty Balfour, Emma Boulnois and Louise Gilbert Samuel as their representatives. In a letter to her husband, Lady Selborne revealed that both she and Millicent Fawcett had pressed for the retention of a week's facilities for the Conciliation Bill in case the women's suffrage amendment should fail:

> Asquith answered … that he adhered absolutely to his pledge regarding the week's facilities, & that we should certainly have that. When the Government brought in the Reform Bill, it would be open to W.S. amendment, & that if any such amendment was carried it would be incorporated into the Bill & the Government would be responsible for taking it through both Houses … After the meeting Lloyd George told me he meant to introduce an amendment to the Reform Bill giving the vote to wives of householders & women householders. I told him I was not at all sure that Unionist suffragists would support such a wide measure. He said 'If I can get 20 I have a majority', so that is where we are now.[55]

The NUWSS was somewhat reassured by Asquith's words, but the WSPU took the view, probably rightly, that Lloyd George was determined to break up the Conciliation Committee coalition and make women's suffrage a party question, thus alienating Unionist sympathisers.[56] They did not believe the House of Commons would support such a widening amendment and they predicted that the women might find themselves with no vote at all. Their immediate reaction was to break the truce, and on 21 November they resumed their militant activities by sending a deputation of women to Parliament Square, while at the same time another group smashed the windows of government offices and business premises, an action which resulted in 220 women being arrested.[57]

The policy of the CUWFA was one of complete opposition to adult suffrage, and Executive Committee issued a strong statement to their supporters:

> There is no demand in the country for a measure of Manhood Suffrage, and as Suffragists we resent our demand for the removal of sex disability being artificially entangled with the widely different issues of adult suffrage, while as Conservatives we protest against the proposal to lower the franchise indiscriminately by a measure which would give a vote to every irresponsible lad of twenty-one, to the exclusion of every responsible, educated woman in the United Kingdom'.[58]

Their male supporters agreed. The Earl of Selborne thought that the Reform Bill proposal was 'an unutterable wrong and an unutterable folly', while Lord Lytton, anxious not to alienate his colleagues on the Conciliation Committee, was more circumspect in his remarks: 'Conservative suffragists would certainly prefer that this long-delayed act of justice should come as the gift of all political parties and unaccompanied by any extension of the Suffrage to men'.[59] Andrew Bonar Law, the new leader of the Unionist coalition after Balfour's resignation on 8 November, had strong views on the matter.[60] Law, a Glaswegian ironmaster, was supportive of women's suffrage and had voted in favour of the 1910 Conciliation Bill. He wrote to Lady Betty Balfour, 'I have felt, and feel strongly, that women should not be deprived of votes on account of their sex; but, on the other hand, the suffrage is already sufficiently extended, for it is most dangerous that absolute power should rest with any one class'. He added, 'I should … have been delighted to see the Conciliation Bill passed, for it might have settled the question for a long time, and without any of the evil effects which I dread'.[61] In a letter to the secretary of the Hull branch of the CUWFA Lord Robert Cecil maintained that a Reform Bill which included women's suffrage would never be passed:

> What chance then will this measure have of becoming law with the Prime Minister and some of his principal colleagues so much opposed to one of its chief provisions as to regard its enactment as a national disaster? I confess it does not seem to me a very good one … What then ought those to do who are really concerned to obtain Votes for Women? It seems to me that they ought to devote their whole energies to secure the passage through the House of Commons of the Conciliation Bill.[62]

The confusion into which the Unionists had been thrown by the announcement of the Reform Bill was apparent in other quarters too. The National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations held their annual conference in Leeds on 16-17 November, and debated, as usual, a resolution in support of women's suffrage. Although the conference had voted in favour of the principle the previous year the decision was reversed on this occasion, and an amendment 'declaring opposition to the enfranchisement of women until the matter had been definitely referred to the opinion of the country' was carried 'by a considerable majority'.[63] With the Reform Bill offering the possibility of a much wider measure of women's suffrage than the conference was prepared to contemplate, the idea of a referendum on the question had been raised again as a solution to what had become an even more politically sensitive question than they had hitherto imagined. The Reform Bill proposal had brought into sharp focus the main reason for much of the Unionist support for female enfranchisement – that the Conciliation Bill measure might act as a barrier to the introduction of adult suffrage.

The Executive Committee of the CUWFA met to discuss the new situation, and their first instinct was to try to ignore the existence of the Reform Bill and press on with the campaign for the Conciliation Bill, as Lord Robert Cecil had advised. With that in mind 'a circular letter was sent to every member of the Association urging upon them the necessity of working more arduously than ever for the Conciliation Bill, as the only practical measure for giving votes to women which is as yet before the country…' The letter urged 'every member of the Association to bring influence to bear on Members of Parliament in order to increase the number of Unionist supporters of the principle of Women's Suffrage'. The Committee were anxious to convey to their members that as Conservative suffragists they were not alone, and that the Conciliation Bill still had support across the parties and in the other suffrage societies: 'We would point out that the Conciliation Bill was not framed by the Suffrage Societies,

but by … a body composed of Members of Parliament from all parties … the Suffrage Societies existed before the Conciliation Bill was framed; we have stood loyally together in the past and we are not dismayed before the threat of unworthy "tricks" which are foredoomed to eventual failure'.[64]

However, despite the united front put on by the CUWFA, there were disagreements among their supporters. Although Lord Lytton and the Earl of Selborne had both expressed their opposition to the Reform Bill they thought that the CUWFA should have a clear policy towards the amendment proposal. There appeared to be several options, but the one favoured by the NUWSS was the 'so-called 'Norwegian' amendment (see table 8 for the final list of amendments).[65] Lord Lytton believed that if the male electorate was going to be dramatically increased then rather than support an amendment along the lines of the Conciliation Bill which would give one million women householders the vote, it might be more sensible to back the 'Norwegian' amendment which would give the franchise to women householders and the wives of householders, thus providing six million women to act as a buffer against the addition of so many working men.[66] Lord Robert Cecil had calculated that these six million women added to the newly enfranchised men would 'increase the electorate from some seven and a half to some seventeen or eighteen millions'.[67] The Earl of Selborne indicated that he favoured the 'Norwegian' amendment in a speech given to a large women's suffrage demonstration in Liverpool on 22 November: 'If I had manhood suffrage forced upon me I personally would rather have the women too … in my experience the average woman cares more for religion and country than the average man. Therefore, in my opinion, the inclusion of women would be a mitigation, and not an increase of the risk'. His words were echoed by the Countess of Selborne, who wrote to Millicent Fawcett: 'There is a very widely spread feeling among Conservative women that if a manhood suffrage Bill is to pass, they think the larger number of women would be desirable. Of course, it goes without saying that they are against any extension of the present suffrage for men'.[68]

Although Lord Lytton had reassured Millicent Fawcett that the CUWFA would support the 'Norwegian' amendment, all the efforts of the organisation were devoted to supporting the Conciliation Bill. On 6 December several prominent Unionist MPs who supported women's suffrage – George Cave, Lords Hugh and Robert Cecil, Alfred Lyttelton, William Mitchell-Thomson and William Ormsby-Gore – sent a letter to *The Times* in response to an anti-suffrage letter from some their party colleagues a few days before. They argued that the Conciliation Bill was the only measure that Unionist suffragists could support, and they spelled out what they saw as the reality of the situation:

> Recent developments only make it more imperative to press forward the Conciliation Bill … Either the Franchise Bill will become law with an extension of the suffrage to women, so wide as to more than double the existing electorate – a result which no moderate reformer can approve – or else it will fail and no women will get the vote, exposing Parliament to the not unjust reproach of having 'tricked' the women. The signatories therefore appeal to 'all moderate supporters of women's suffrage' to continue the advocacy of the Bill.[69]

It was intended that the Reform Bill would be heard before the Conciliation Bill, but due to continuing dissent among Liberal ministers over the suffrage issue the government announced in February 1912 that it would be delaying the Reform Bill until the following year.[70] This meant that the Conciliation Bill would be heard much sooner than expected, and once again the suffrage societies were thrown into confusion. At the beginning of March the WSPU began a campaign of violence against property which involved the smashing of the windows of London department stores and 10, Downing Street, and led to Mrs Pankhurst and many of her supporters being arrested and subsequently imprisoned.[71] The CUWFA, which was immediately anxious to disown the violence, and on 7 March the Executive Committee drew up a letter to send to the press, 'expressing our deep regret at the attitude of the militant Suffragists, and dissociating ourselves completely and entirely from their demonstrations, and once again confirming our own absolutely constitutional methods, which we believe to be consistent with the principles of the Conservative and Unionist Party…'[72] In her journal entry for the same day Lady Knightley was also concerned about the consequences of the actions of the suffragettes, 'who have been behaving like heaven-forsaken idiots, smashing windows all over the town. I am afraid this will completely put an end to all our chances'.[73]

On 27 March, the day before the Conciliation Bill was to be heard, all the suffrage societies sent letters to the press urging MPs to vote for the Bill. The CUWFA sent an appeal which was signed by the Countess of Selborne and 68 other prominent members. The actions of the WSPU had put them on the defensive, and after asking for the support of 'our friends … who have served us with true loyalty, and not with words of promise only', they went on, 'we shall scan the division lists with great anxiety to see the names of those who are our real friends, and who, having constantly maintained our cause, are undeterred by the clamour which has arisen through no fault of ours'. Unfortunately on the same page there was a list of those MPs who had previously supported women's suffrage but had announced that they would

not be doing so this time, and among the names were the Unionists George Cave and H. Mallaby-Deeley.[74] On the day of the debate an editorial in *The Times* asked whether Unionists could support 'a Constitutional revolution which goes deeper than Welsh disestablishment or even Home Rule?'[75]

The Failure of the 1912 Conciliation Bill – the end of the CUWFA's hopes?

The Conciliation Bill came before the House of Commons once again on 28 March 1912, when the second reading was introduced by the Conciliation Committee member and Unionist MP for Cheltenham, James Agg-Gardner. He noted that 153 city and district councils had now passed resolutions in favour of women's suffrage, and he made a point of condemning the militant activities of the WSPU. He hoped that 'these tactics … will not be allowed to alienate the vote of those in this House who have hitherto supported the objects of the Bill', and that MPs would not 'crush the anxious aspirations of the many because of the excesses of the few'.[76] The debate was short and dominated by the speeches made by Asquith, his suffragist Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, and Lord Robert Cecil. The Prime Minister stuck resolutely to the predictable anti-suffragist arguments – that there was no demand for the measure, and it would be 'injurious to women' and dangerous to 'the future good government of this country'.[77] The actions of the WSPU had played into the hands of those MPs like Asquith who believed that women by nature unstable and poorly qualified to make considered political judgments, although they probably would have held those views even if the militants had not existed. Lord Robert Cecil was forced to devote a great deal of his speech to defending the limited scope of the Conciliation Bill itself – Liberal and Labour MPs had become increasingly critical of what they believed was the bias of the Bill towards the Unionists since the announcement of the proposed adult suffrage measure.[78]

There was a feeling that the arguments on both sides had been rehearsed so many times that there was little left to say, and that those who spoke in favour of the Conciliation measure were more concerned to distance themselves from the activities of the militants than argue the virtues of women's suffrage. Lady Robert Cecil accurately summed up the mood in the House: 'The debate … produced no very outstanding features. The front opposition bench agreed among themselves to take no part. Among ministers, Mr Asquith made a few declamatory remarks, making no attempt at argument … Throughout the debate an atmosphere of unreality prevailed'.[79] The division went the way that Asquith had predicted, and the Bill was lost by 14 votes (see Appendices for detailed figures).

Table 7
Voting figures in the division on the Conciliation Bill, 28 March 1912 (including tellers)[80]

	For	Against	Total voting in division	Total number of MPs
Unionists	64	115	179	278
Liberals	117	74	191	266
Irish Nationalists	4	35	39	84
Labour	25	–	25	42
Total	210	224	434	670

Note: In addition, 68 MPs paired for the Bill.

As the figures in tables 6 and 7 show that there was a considerable reduction in support for the Bill. Of the total number of Unionists who voted in the division 35.8% had voted for the Bill and 64.2% against, compared to 57.4% for and 42.6% against in 1911 – many of them had changed from being an abstainer to an opponent of the measure. The Liberal vote had changed too – of the total number of Liberals who voted 61.3% had voted for and 38.7% against the Bill, compared to 78.8% for and 21.2% against in 1911. However, the most dramatic change was in the Irish Nationalist vote. This time 10.3% of all those who voted were in favour and 89.7% were against, whereas in 1911 there were 79.1% for and 20.9% against. The Labour figures remained overwhelmingly in favour but fewer of their MPs voted (see Appendices for fuller details).

Why, after the 1911 Bill had been so successful was the Bill defeated on this occasion? *The Globe*, a Unionist newspaper, identified two major reasons why the Bill had been defeated:

> What may be regarded as the surprise of the division was the large vote given by the Nationalists against the Bill, in spite of the fact that many of the Redmondites are known to be supporters of Women's Suffrage … the Nationalists do not want the time of the House to be filched from the Home Rule Bill … and … have been afraid that if the Woman Suffrage movement were carried further grave complications might ensue in the Cabinet, and that at least one stalwart Home Ruler might have resigned his office … Not only did the Nationalists make the question one of party expediency, a number

> of the members on the Labour bench were absent in the country in connection with the industrial crisis, and their vote, which would have been cast for the Bill … might also have turned the scale'.[81]

There was another factor that had influenced some MPs to change their vote, and that was the outbreak of WSPU militancy in early March. Robert Sanders, a Unionist whip who had voted for the 1910 Conciliation Bill, commented in his diary: 'Bill would have been carried if it had not been for the window breaking. I voted for it, but was not very sad when it was beaten. It shows that this form of hooliganism does not pay'.[82] The CUWFA were the first to recognise that the actions of the WSPU had been the very excuse which wavering Unionist supporters were looking for, although their condemnation was reserved more for the politicians than the militants:

> Hysteria, it seems, breeds hysteria. At all events broken windows were promptly followed by a stampede of promise-breaking members of Parliament, unable, or else unwilling to distinguish between a small band of misguided enthusiasts, and the vast mass of sober, law-abiding women who are … the real support and vital force of the Suffrage movement … these vacillating politicians, blown about by every breath of public opinion, without a mind to call their own, have our sincere commiseration'.[83]

After the Conciliation Bill had been defeated suffragists were left with the hope that an amendment to the Franchise and Registration Bill (as the new Reform Bill was known) would provide what could be a last chance to obtain women's suffrage for some time. There were so many different forces to be weighed in the balance – the continued opposition of the Irish Nationalists; the Labour Party's determination to achieve male adult suffrage, even if it meant they might have to reluctantly jettison a woman's suffrage amendment; the Unionist hostility to any adult suffrage measure; Asquith's antipathy to the whole idea of female enfranchisement; and the refusal of the WSPU to abandon the militant protests which were alienating a substantial number of MPs who were sympathetic to women's suffrage. There seemed little hope of reconciling all these contradictory forces. Despite the fact that they had been so committed to the Conciliation Bill the CUWFA put a brave face on the situation. Louise Gilbert Samuel reported in the *Review*: 'I am pleased to be able to inform our readers that none of our active supporters and workers have been in the slightest degree

discouraged by the failure of the Conciliation Bill. Our work has been growing apace, and satisfactory results are shewn in all directions'.[84]

The reality was that the members of the CUWFA and their supporters were disheartened about the failure of the one women's suffrage measure they believed that Unionist MPs could vote for in good conscience. To add to their difficulties the Conciliation Committee decided they could do no more and disbanded – the non-party approach seemed to have achieved far less than everyone had hoped. Leventhal has suggested that there were a number of factors which led to the demise of the Committee:

> The Conciliation Bill, seeking to satisfy too many groups, aroused more suspicion than enthusiasm. A non-partisan solution proposed at a time of intense party feeling, it attempted to make a moral issue out of a question with political ramifications. Preoccupied with social legislation, Ireland, the House of Lords, and the worsening international situation, the Liberal Government continued to regard women's suffrage as an irritant … once militancy revived at the end of 1911, the political atmosphere became so charged with animosity that compromise became impossible. As a collection of backbenchers drawn from all quarters, the Conciliation Committee never threatened the government's tenure and ministers … disregarded it with impunity'.[85]

Although Leventhal did not explicitly state that one of the most divisive factors was the Liberal belief that the Unionist members had influenced the Committee to adopt a restricted franchise which would benefit their own party, the rest of his argument is a convincing one. It is true that the Unionist backbenchers on the Committee had very little influence on the Unionist leadership, and were often new MPs seeking a role in political affairs, hence the number of members who joined the 'legion of leagues' which were so popular among Unionists during this period.[86] As Leventhal has suggested, the years preceding the outbreak of war were 'a time of intense party feeling', and the Committee had been formed at a time when the suffragists' non-party approach had become increasingly inappropriate. The cause had not been helped by the fact that the suffragists' had always relied on the private member's bill, which had become increasingly marginalised as governments extended their control over the business timetable of the House of Commons. Pugh has argued that, in retrospect, 'the insistence on … following a non-party strategy showed a lack of realism', and Harrison has

supported that argument by suggesting that the constitutional suffrage societies were hampered by their own 'tactical conservatism'.[87] It was an understanding of the need for change that led some members of the NUWSS to think about adopting a new approach to their campaign.

The NUWSS had become completely disillusioned with the Liberal Party after the failure of the Conciliation Bill for a third time, and, at the instigation of Millicent Fawcett, decided that they would seek an alliance with the one party that had consistently supported their cause in Parliament – the Labour Party. The Election Fighting Fund (EFF) was designed to penalise the Liberals and reward Labour by raising money to support Labour parliamentary candidates at by-elections where Liberal anti-suffragists were standing against them. Hume has suggested that there was a short and a long-term purpose to the EFF and both were intended to coerce the Liberals into passing a women's suffrage measure. The first was to set up three-way contests at by-elections in the hope that it might lead to a loss of Liberal MPs, and the second was to increase the number of seats which Labour would contest at the next general election with the idea of adding to the Labour contingent in the House of Commons and building up a pro-suffrage majority. Although the NUWSS believed that the by-election policy might benefit the Unionists, they 'were inclined to feel that their position could be no worse under a Conservative Government, particularly as the leadership of the party included a distinguished suffragist component'.[88] Fawcett insisted that the alliance with Labour was a temporary one and that the NUWSS would keep their non-party status. Although both the NUWSS and the Labour Party had many reservations about the alliance, the EFF was set up in July 1912.

The CUWFA campaign for the women's suffrage amendments to the Franchise Bill

From April 1912 to January 1913 the constitutional suffrage societies worked to secure amendments to the Franchise and Registration Bill. The Liberals had designed the Bill to abolish the practice of plural voting and to shorten the residency qualification – two of the franchise qualifications that had always benefited the Unionists. The Franchise Bill had its first reading on 17 June and passed its second reading on 12 July 1912, by which time the different women's suffrage amendments had been published and were to be considered when the bill was read a third time (see table 8). With considerable reservations, but accepting some kind of adult suffrage bill seemed to be an inevitability, the CUWFA, influenced by the advice of Lord Lytton and Lord Robert Cecil who were in touch with the NUWSS, suggested to members that they should concentrate all their efforts on the Dickinson or 'Norwegian'

amendment with the Conciliation amendment as a fall-back position.[89] This approach was supported by the Countess of Selborne, who continued to argue that an amendment to the Franchise Bill which would enfranchise the wives of householders would not present a threat to Unionists since 'the wives would be a conservative force'. However, not everyone was as certain as the Countess of Selborne that the 'Norwegian' amendment should be supported by the CUWFA – Lady Betty Balfour preferred the Conciliation amendment, despite the fact that 'one million women voters … would appear to be uselessly small'.[90] The whole idea of the Franchise Bill was rejected by the overwhelming majority of Unionists, and there was a certain lack of enthusiasm evident in the discussion of the proposed legislation in the *Review*.

In her regular reports the *Review*, the Countess of Selborne laid out the strategy for the next stage of the CUWFA suffrage campaign.[91] She continued to argue that an amendment to the Franchise Bill which would enfranchise the wives of householders – the 'Norwegian' amendment – would not present a threat to Unionists:

> I am inclined to believe that, as a party, the Conservatives would reap the most benefit from the enfranchisement of the wives. As a rule these would vote with their husbands, thus giving the married men greater power at the polls than the single men. And surely the family is the foundation of Conservatism. The care of the children, the responsibility for their welfare, the desire that tranquility [sic] may continue, the recognition of the importance of industrial stability, are the very roots of that sober and measured Conservatism, which finds its most direct expression in the Conservative Party, but we are glad to think, permeates all parties and all classes, – at least among English people.[92]

As President of the CUWFA, Lady Selborne could not have made the link between Conservatism and women's suffrage more powerfully, and her words were redolent of her father Lord Salisbury's speech on the same subject over twenty years before, when he had stated his belief that women's influence lay in the direction 'of morality and religion'. As well advocating the 'Norwegian' amendment on the grounds of its Conservative credentials, she also believed that it offered 'a possibility of co-operation with our Liberal friends'.[93] The existence of the pact between the NUWSS and the Labour Party did not appear to present a problem to the CUWFA, and the subject was never discussed in the *Review*, despite being the cause of considerable controversy within the NUWSS itself. The pact could have driven a wedge between the two suffrage societies, but CUWFA branches

Table 8
The Franchise and Registration Bill and the Proposed Women's Suffrage Amendments

Clause I

1. Subject to the provisions of this Act, every male person shall be entitled to be registered as a Parliamentary elector for a constituency, if that person is qualified in accordance with this Act to be registered in that constituency, and while so registered shall be entitled to vote at an election of a member to serve in Parliament for that constituency; but a person shall not be registered or vote for more than one constituency.

2. For the purposes of this Act a person shall be qualified to be registered in a constituency as a Parliamentary elector if that person resides, or is an occupier of land or premises, in that constituency, and has so resided, or been an occupier, for a continuous period of at least six months last past, or during such a period has so resided for part of the period, and so been an occupier for the remainder of the period.

Grey Amendment.

This amendment would delete the word 'male' from the phrase 'every male person' in clause I, section 1. This amendment was a preliminary step to the other three amendmentsIf it was successful, the House of Commons would still have to decide which women should be qualified, and how they should qualify.

Henderson Amendment (or Adult Suffrage Amendment)

This amendment would add to the phrase 'every person' in clause I, section 1, the words 'of either sex', and it would also incorporate these words into clause I, section 2. It would enfranchise about 10 million women.

Dickinson Amendment (or Norwegian Amendment)

This amendment, which would be inserted in clause I, section 2, would qualify a woman to register 'if she is over 25 years of age and is the inhabitant occupier, as owner or tenant, or the wife of such an inhabitant occupier, of a dwelling-house in that constituency, and has resided therein for a period of at least six months last past, provided that, except as herein enacted, no women shall be registered as joint occupiers in respect of the same dwelling'. This gave the vote to all women householders and wives of householders, thus enfranchising about 6 million women.

Conciliation Amendment (or the Lyttelton Amendment)

This amendment, which should be included in clause I, section 2, stipulated that 'a person being a female shall be qualified to be registered in a constituency as a Parliamentary elector if she is a local government elector for the purpose of all local government elections in that constituency'. This meant that only women householders could qualify and about 1.5 women would be enfranchised.

(The information for this table has been taken from Hume, L. P., *The National Union of Suffrage Societies*, pp.173-174, and Rover, C., *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain*, pp.201-202).

chose to co-operate even more with the NUWSS than they had done in the past, and an increasing number of joint activities were undertaken over the following months. At local level there was a growing feeling of camaraderie among suffragists which meant that party differences were often put aside for the greater good of the suffrage cause, although Cowman has pointed out the amount of co-operation often depended on the degree to which that local suffrage organisations were divided by class and political affiliation.[94]

During the next few months the CUWFA groups sent deputations to their MPs and prospective Unionist candidates, held public meetings and organised deputations, organised joint meetings with Women's Unionist Associations and canvassed women municipal voters to increase membership. There were many joint meetings with other suffrage organisations during this period – in Leamington CUWFA branches combined with the Church League for Women's Suffrage and the West Midlands Federation of the NUWSS to hold a 'Franchise Fete', at Cheltenham the local CUWFA and NUWSS branches organised a campaign which involved putting posters designed by the Suffrage Atelier on hoardings in the town, and the Cirencester, Edinburgh, Harrow and Hayling Island branches all joined with the NUWSS to hold public meetings in support of the Franchise Bill amendments.[95] The Hull branch held a meeting with the East Hull Women Unionists and the Junior Unionists, and other local Unionist associations asked for speakers on the women's suffrage question. Canvasses of municipal voters were organised by branches in Marylebone and Paddington, St George's, Hanover Square, and Woking, and this led to new members and promises of support. The Edinburgh group visited two of the city's prospective Unionist candidates, who both refused to support women's suffrage, with the result that the branch announced that their members would not be working to support their candidature.[96]

The third reading of the Franchise Bill took place on 23 January 1913, and the first of the women's suffrage amendments was to be heard in committee the following day. Before the debate began Bonar Law asked the Speaker for a ruling on whether the amendments to the Bill 'make such a material difference in the Bill that in accordance with the practice of this House, a new Bill should be introduced and read a second time'. The Speaker delayed his ruling, but stated that 'if such substantial Amendments are made during the passage of a Bill in Committee as materially to affect the form and substance of the Bill in such a way as to make it, for all practical purposes, a new Bill, then it is necessary for that Bill to be withdrawn…'.[97] On 27 January the Speaker ruled that the amendments to

the Franchise Bill were not admissable, and immediately Asquith announced that the government would be dropping the measure and introducing a Plural Voting Bill instead.[98] He then announced that, in compensation, the government would offer full facilities for a private member's women's suffrage bill in the next session. Although the Prime Minister always claimed that the Speaker's ruling was a surprise, Sandra Holton's accusation that the Liberal government allowed the Unionists to destroy its Franchise Bill would seem to be confirmed in the diary of the Unionist whip Robert Sanders. Six months earlier, on 19 June 1912, he had recorded that he believed the measure had been introduced solely 'to fulfil Asquith's promise that a female suffrage amendment be put in. The Speaker has told Banbury that such an amendment would not be in order after the defeat of Agg-Gardener's [sic] Bill. No doubt Asquith knows this. It is pretty low down. The Bill itself sounds very bad for our party'.[99]

If the NUWSS felt betrayed and let down by the Speaker's ruling, the CUWFA'S reaction was one of relief. They had never supported the Franchise Bill, and the Conciliation amendment, which the majority of the membership favoured, had stood little chance of success. Lady Robert Cecil wrote in the *Review*: 'If our political object is for a time postponed, Mr Asquith's impudent, and I may add, inept, scheme to replace "some votes for women" by "more votes for men" is utterly destroyed'. In her journal Lady Knightley observed pessimistically: 'Just the sort of thing that always happens to us. However I don't think it will make much difference as the Lords would be sure to throw it out'.[100] The reaction of the WSPU to the Speaker's ruling was to begin a campaign of violent protest which was later described in graphic detail by Sylvia Pankhurst:

> The brief truce before the withdrawal of the Reform Bill … was followed by destructive militancy on a hitherto unparalleled scale, petty injuries and annoyances continuing side by side with large-scale damage. Street lamps were broken … chairs flung in the Serpentine, cushions of railway carriages slashed, flower-beds damaged, golf greens all over the country scraped and burnt with acid … Empty houses and other unattended buildings were systematically sought out and set on fire … Bombs were placed near the Bank of England … Lloyd George's new house in process of erection at Walton-on-the-Hill was injured beyond repair by a bomb explosion.'

The most dramatic protest of all was that of Emily Wilding Davison, who ran out onto the Derby racecourse on 4 June 1913 and was struck down by

the King's horse and seriously injured. Davison died in hospital a few days later, and on 14 June the WSPU staged a spectacular 'martyr's' funeral, with 2,000 suffragettes following the coffin through London streets that were lined by silent spectators.[101]

The Dickinson Bill – the end of the road for women's suffrage?

The debate on the Dickinson Bill – the bill which Asquith had promised to allow to be heard after the Reform Bill debacle – began on 5 May 1913, and has largely been dismissed by suffrage historians.[102] The NUWSS did not campaign for the measure since by now they were convinced that a private member's bill would never succeed. Only three months before Millicent Fawcett had admitted that 'every unofficial effort' was 'doomed to failure', and the only hope was 'nothing less than a Government measure'.[103] The Dickinson Bill had been drafted by a committee of suffragist MPs from all parties, and the result was a proposal which pleased nobody. It was based on the Dickinson or 'Norwegian' amendment to the Reform Bill, and enfranchised women householders and wives of householders of 25 years of age and over. The possible enfranchisement of six million women, compared to the Conciliation Bill's one million, had alienated all but the most determined of the Unionist suffragists, who hoped that they might be able to amend such a measure in committee at a later stage.[104] The Irish Nationalists remained reluctant to support a bill which could lead to a Liberal split and imperil Home Rule, but the support of the Liberal and Labour suffragists was holding up well. The violent campaign of the WSPU had not helped matters, and had provided a convenient excuse for waverers to vote against the Bill.

Although from the beginning the Bill seemed destined to fail, the debate lasted two days and attracted some speakers who had not made a contribution before. Asquith was present and made a strong speech, but once again the Unionist front bench was empty – it had been some time since men like Balfour had spoken on the subject in the House of Commons. One Unionist anti-suffragist took the view that 'they have realised that the game is up, and there is not one of them who intends to support it by his vote tonight', and the prediction turned out to be correct. Neither Balfour or his successor Bonar Law, both of whom had voted in favour of women's suffrage in 1910 and 1912, voted in the division, nor did several Unionists who had been members of the Conciliation Committee.[105] Some Unionists from the Conciliation Committee did speak, with the usual reservations about the scope of the measure, and they included Edward Goulding, who looked back nostalgically to Lord Salisbury's support for women's suffrage on the grounds of their anti-socialist instincts,

and George Touche, who suggested that the policy of the militants was 'a policy of despair', which had arisen out of 'a systematic shelving of this question during fifty years of peaceful persuasion'. However, it was Arnold Ward, the passionate Unionist anti-suffragist, who articulated what Fawcett and everyone else knew, that 'Women Suffrage, in order to be successful, must be made a Government measure'.[106]

Table 9
Voting figures in the division on the Dickinson Bill, 5-6 May 1913 (including tellers)[107]

	For	Against	Total voting in division	Total number of MPs
Unionists	28	139	167	281
Liberals	145	76	221	265
Irish Nationalists	13	54	67	84
Labour	35	–	35	40
Total	221	269	490	670

The Bill was lost, but few were surprised (see table 9 above). It had been the largest number of votes against a women's suffrage bill since the defeat of Woodall's amendment to the 1884 Reform Act, and the largest Unionist vote against such a measure since 1879 (see Appendices).[108] Of the total number of Unionist votes cast only 16.8 % were for the Bill while 83.2 % were against, although the turnout was not one of the highest – 59.4% of all the Unionist MPs in the House of Commons voted.

The CUWFA gave the defeat of the Dickinson Bill a low-key reception, and at a meeting of the Women's Council on 20 May the Countess of Selborne admitted that the measure had been too wide, and 'a great deal of educative work would have to be done' before Unionists would be prepared to accept such a bill. It was agreed that over the coming months the CUWFA should concentrate on recruiting more members and establishing new branches, with the aim of building up support in as many constituencies as possible. Lord Robert Cecil's report to the *Review* reflected the realisation that a watershed had been reached in the constitutional campaign for women's suffrage. Cecil confessed that the situation looked bleak: 'I think we must admit that in the present Parliament there is no probability that a private Member's Bill granting votes for women would be passed by the House of Commons, and I am afraid I see even less probability of the Government

taking up a Bill and passing it, as they ought to do'.[109] Cecil went on to outline where he saw the CUWFA campaign going in the future, and he agreed with the Countess of Selborne that it was necessary to persuade women to use the rights which they had already gained to influence the politicians:

> What is the proper course now for Suffragists, and and particularly Unionist Suffragists, to take? … Women have some weapons which I do not think have ever been sufficiently used; they have the Municipal vote, a weapon of enormous importance … If they can obtain real influence in the political organisations of the country, their cause is won.

The Dickinson Bill was the last women's suffrage bill to be debated in the House of Commons before the outbreak of war in August 1914, but the constitutional suffrage societies continued with their campaign in the hope that the general election, due to be held by 1915, would give them a further opportunity to convince the political parties to place women's suffrage on their official programme. They wanted to make women's suffrage a genuinely popular cause, and the most important campaigning activity in 1913 was the Suffrage Pilgrimage, which was organised by the NUWSS, and in which many of the CUWFA groups played a part. The Pilgrimage was designed to be a peaceful contrast to the militant activities of the WSPU, and to attract as much public attention as possible. The idea was that a number of marches would start from seventeen cities on 18 June and follow their routes over a period of weeks with more supporters joining as they went along. The whole event would culminate in a mass public meeting in Hyde Park on 26 July, where one of the speakers would be Lady Strachey of the CUWFA. A number of local CUWFA groups participated in the event, which was one of the most successful ever mounted – the Stratford-on-Avon branch of the CUWFA put up the 70 pilgrims overnight, Bristol members joined the Pilgrimage Procession through the centre of the city, and Woking members, including Lady Betty Balfour, joined the Pilgrimage on its last stage to Hyde Park.[110]

Another significant development which took place in the summer of 1913 was the founding of the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union (LWSU) by Eleanor Acland. Liberal suffragists had become increasingly disillusioned by the failure of their party to settle the suffrage question, and the Women's Liberal Federation had lost branches and members. One of the main objects of the new organisation was to rally more support within the Liberal Party for the enfranchisement of women, and to work for Liberal suffragist MPs

and prospective candidates only – campaigning ideas which the CUWFA had adopted almost five years before. Although they never admitted it, the Liberal women had come to realise that the CUWFA's strategy to convince their own party first and foremost of the importance of women's suffrage was one which could help their own campaign.[111]

While the CUWFA continued to organise their usual campaigning activities, three of their most dedicated male supporters, Lord Robert Cecil, the Earl of Selborne and Lord Lytton, launched political initiatives in support of the suffrage cause. Lord Robert Cecil went to the annual conference of the National Union of Conservative Associations in November 1913 and attempted to persuade them to pass a resolution in favour of women's suffrage as a matter of policy, but he was defeated by a motion brought forward by Arnold Ward, which stated that the party should refer the matter to the judgment of the electorate.[112] The next initiative came on 5 May 1914 when, with the support of the CUWFA, the Earl of Selborne introduced the second reading of a women's enfranchisement bill based on the municipal qualification in the House of Lords.[113] The bill was lost by 44 votes, but after the debate the Review reported that 'the sixty peers who voted in its favour, included the Archbishop of Canterbury, five bishops, 32 Unionists and 22 Liberals. During the two days' discussion, the Bishop of London, Bishop of Oxford, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Willoughby de Broke, Lord Malmesbury, Lord Newton, Lord Courtney, and Lord Aberconway, among others, spoke in favour of the Bill, the debate being wound up by Lord Lytton, whose magificent speech will go down to posterity as the finest appeal ever made on behalf of Women's Suffrage'.[114] The NUWSS knew of the initiative but did not campaign for it, since not only was it a private member's bill but they believed it to be 'a Conservative measure framed in the interests of the Conservative Party'.[115] However, they did help to 'whip up' Liberal peers and the Bill was seen as a valuable way to raise the suffrage question in the House of Lords.

In the late autumn of 1913 the NUWSS had begun to forge links with Lord Robert Cecil and the Earl of Lytton to examine the idea that a future Unionist government might be persuaded to bring in a women's suffrage bill. A general election would have to be held by 1915, and it might be possible to spur the Liberals into action with the threat of a Conservative measure. Both men suggested that the only way this might be achieved would be by holding some form of referendum on the issue. Cecil proposed that a government bill should be introduced, probably along Conciliation lines, and if it was passed a referendum should be held to decide whether women should be enfranchised. Lytton proposed what he called an

'initiatory' referendum, which would ask voters to decide on 'the general principle' of admitting women to the electorate rather than on a particular form of women's suffrage. If the answer was in the affirmative the government would then introduce a women's suffrage bill. The Countess of Selborne had submitted a proposal which was similar to Lytton's, but gave the electorate the choice of different kinds of bills to vote for. On 20 May Lytton and Cecil met representatives of the NUWSS to discuss the referendum proposals, but by August 1914, on the eve of war, they had come to no agreement, except that pressure should be put on Unionist leaders to state what they proposed to do about women's suffrage should they gain power.[116] It seemed that the suffrage movement had lost its momentum and was beginning to run out of ideas.

In the last edition of the *Review* published before the outbreak of war, when virtually all suffrage campaigning ceased, the Earl of Lytton made a rallying call to the CUWFA members, who were looking forward to the prospect of a change of government at the next general election:

> While the political equality of the sexes is the object of the Suffrage Societies, it must be apparent to anyone who has discussed this question … that public opinion is not yet ripe for a measure of universal adult Suffrage. The vast majority of those who are in favour of the principal [sic] of Woman Suffrage at the present time would only support a moderate addition of women to the electorate. The only Party, therefore, which could introduce a Woman Suffrage Bill consistent at once with their political principles, the demand of the women and the public opinion of the country, is the Conservative Party; and Conservative Suffragists should be at pains to make this clear.[117]

The cautious approach of the Conservative is evident, and Lytton's assessment of the willingness of the authorities to consider no more than 'a moderate addition' of women to the electorate was borne out in 1918, when the Representation of the People Act entitled some women to vote in British parliamentary elections for the first time. Women had to be registered as voters if they were 30 years of age and were local government electors or were married to local government electors – approximately 8.5 million women were enfranchised by the Act, leaving 5 million without a vote.[118]

CONCLUSION

One of the most important aims of this book has been to establish the place, as far as is possible, of Conservative suffragists in the history of the organised women's suffrage movement in Britain. In an account which has been dominated by the activities of the militant suffragettes, and continues to be today, the importance of the constitutional campaign for women's enfranchisement has not always received wholehearted recognition from suffrage historians. Embedded within this history of women's struggle to achieve the vote are the Conservative suffragists, who have been shown in this study to have been actively involved in the movement, albeit in relatively small numbers, from the submission of the suffrage petition to Parliament in 1866 until the achievement of partial enfranchisement in 1918. A detailed assessment of their role has been clearly overdue, and this study has sought to remedy a significant gap in suffrage history.

Although aristocratic women had always been involved in the social dimension of politics, it was in the Primrose League that most Conservative women received their grounding in the political issues of the day. By becoming active members of this mass organisation they began to publicly express the class and party loyalties which had become a dominant factor in political life towards the end of the nineteenth century. Always anxious not to enter into 'contentious politics' the League tried to marginalise the question of women's suffrage, but it was notably unsuccessful on many occasions. While Hannam has suggested that 'Liberal women were particularly aggressive in pushing forward the claims of their sex', and they 'aimed to cultivate female political power', this study has shown that Conservative women were equally aggressive in putting forward the claims of their party, and their right to a political voice in it.[1]

The early suffrage movement came out of a background of assumptions about the 'nature' of women and their special responsibilities as wives and

mothers, and this emphasis on the place and duties of women in society permeated suffragist discourse during the whole course of the franchise campaign. Although Conservative women happily participated in this debate, the language of political idealism and moral transformation which dominated a great deal of suffrage rhetoric implied a serious commitment to political and social change, and it is in this area that the contribution of Conservative women to the campaign for female enfranchisement has been questioned by suffrage historians and their contribution confined to the margins of suffrage history. A distrust of change and a distinctive urge to defend the established order has long been associated with Conservative thinking, and Conservative suffragists reflected this turn of mind in their desire to protect their class interests by restricting the qualifications by which women would be entitled to vote, and insisting that citizenship had to earned, through the possession of property, education and the payment of rates and taxes. In comparison with the idealism of the more radical Liberal suffragists this approach has often been viewed as surrendering to narrow party interests rather than looking to the greater goal of the vote for all women, and has led to considerable agonising by some suffrage historians about the feminist credentials of the women of the CUWFA. It has been the contention of this study that there was a diversity of approach and political commitment among the members of the women's suffrage movement which cannot be subsumed into the category 'feminist', and that the contribution of Conservative women has an important and legitimate place in suffrage history.

The small band of men who were prepared to help the Conservative women in their suffrage campaign have been shown to be exceptional – usually family members of the aristocratic leaders of Conservative suffragism, who were surrounded by strong and articulate women whom they believed were the kind of voters who could stabilise society and strengthen the existing political system. The men of the Conciliation Committee had their own individual agendas – some saw the 'civilising influence' of women as a way of fighting socialism, while others saw it as an aid to the consolidation of Britain's imperial rule. All were agreed that a limited measure of enfranchisement for women might help to stave off a move towards adult suffrage. However, in the closed environment of the all-male Houses of Parliament, successive Conservative leaders who were sympathetic to the principle of women's suffrage did not take up the issue as party policy – the fear that instead of keeping adult suffrage at bay the next Liberal government might use such a concession to justify its introduction, the general belief that constitutional change should be

organic rather than precipitous, the hostile reaction of their backbenchers, and the low position of women's suffrage in the order of political importance – all these things contributed to a lack of will to institute any change.

In founding the Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Association in 1908, Conservative women suffragists changed their political strategy from one of 'coaxing' to 'caucussing'. They had already formed the Women's Unionist and Tariff Reform Association in 1903 to lobby for protectionist trade policies, but the new organisation was different. Women's suffrage was never widely supported in the Conservative Party at large, so it was a bold move to establish a pressure group designed to convince fellow Conservatives to change their minds on the issue, particularly as many continued to be haunted by the fear that the extension of democracy would lead to class conflict and make the government more susceptible to the whims of an uneducated electorate. The CUWFA was successful enough to become the third largest women's suffrage organisation in terms of branch numbers by 1913.

It is clear from many of the speeches and articles in the *Review* that the women of the CUWFA based their campaign on suffrage for propertied women because it was in their class and party interests to do so, but they also expressed the wish to take on the maternalist role of working to improve the lives of working-class women, since it fitted in with a widely-held belief in the importance of improving the moral and physical state of the nation and the Empire. By becoming involved in the suffrage struggle some Conservative women were able to see beyond the limits of their own experience, and in the process began to analyse some of the ways in which women were marginalised in society. Asserting the position of women without altering the constitution of society was seen as a perfectly respectable position for Conservative suffragists – the vote could help them to do this, and it could also help to keep their party in power.

Despite what appears to be the dominance of party interests in Conservative suffragism, the women of the CUWFA were able to establish friendly campaigning links with the predominantly Liberal NUWSS without compromising their own particular aims and objectives, and even found it possible to continue those links when the pact with the Labour Party was forged by Millicent Fawcett in 1912. Although this move aroused a great deal of controversy within the ranks of Conservative suffragism the benefits of female enfranchisement to the Conservative Party were temporarily set aside in the quest for the parliamentary vote as an end in itself, as frustration increased with each unsuccessful suffrage bill.

However, despite these alliances, the ideological basis of the Conservative women's arguments for the suffrage rested on fundamental beliefs which had always preoccupied the Party – the promotion of an ordered and stable political society based on tradition and resistance to change, the protection of property, the assertion of Empire and the allegiance to crown, constitution, and established religion. The women of the CUWFA campaigned for the recognition by their party of the contribution which they had made in the past, and would continue to make in the future, towards preserving these principles. Perhaps their most significant achievement was to persuade the Conservative Party of the potential value of women's suffrage. By 1914 an increasing number of Conservative MPs were beginning to concede that the time had come to pass a limited women's suffrage measure, if only to prevent the Liberals from bringing in far wider reforms.

APPENDICES

Note:
All voting figures (which include tellers) have been taken from HC Debates and Brian Harrison's detailed analysis in *Separate Spheres*, pp.28-29. The occasion, in December 1884, where leave was sought to bring in a bill, the times that a bill was talked out, as in 1877, 1905, 1906 and 1907, Adult Suffrage Bills which included women's suffrage in 1906 and 1909, and the second reading of the Government Franchise Bill of July 1912 have not been listed. The figures for the Labour Party begin at 1910, as political allegiances are difficult to assign before 1909, when the Miners' Federation MPs joined the Labour benches

Appendix I
Analysis of the Conservative and Unionist vote in the key women's suffrage divisions between 1867 –1913

Date of division	No. of Cons. & Unst. voting for	No. of Cons. & Unst. voting against	Total no. of Cons. & Unst. voting in division	Total no. of Cons. & Unst. in House	Of Con. & Unst. votes – % for	Of Con. & Unst. votes – % against	Of total Cons. & Unst. MPs in House – % voting in Division
1867a	11	116	127	298	8.7	91.3	42.6
1870	31	41	72	280	43.1	56.9	25.7
1870b	33	88	121	280	27.3	72.7	43.2
1871	52	105	157	284	33.1	66.9	55.3
1872	35	111	146	291	24.0	76.0	50.1
1873	48	107	155	291	31.0	69.0	53.3
1875	64	117	181	352	35.4	64.6	51.4
1876	61	153	214	352	28.5	71.5	60.8
1878	37	149	186	349	19.9	80.1	53.3
1879	28	152	180	349	15.6	84.4	51.5
1883	21	81	101	252	20.8	79.2	40.0
1884c	95	28	123	254	77.2	22.8	48.4
1886	58	35	93	249	62.4	37.6	37.4
1892	87	87	174	374	50.0	50.0	46.6
1897	138	110	248	408	55.6	44.4	60.8
1904d	75	52	127	392	59.1	40.9	32.4
1908	34	30	64	162	53.1	46.9	39.5
1910	88	114	202	273	43.3	56.7	74.3
1911	62	46	108	274	57.4	42.6	39.4
1912	64	115	179	278	35.8	64.2	64.4
1912e	81	65	146	281	55.5	44.5	51.9
1913	28	139	167	281	16.8	83.2	59.4

a Mill's women's suffrage amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill.
b This vote was taken at the Committee stage of the previous Bill.
c Woodall's women's suffrage amendment to the 1884 Reform Bill.
d Sir Charles McLaren's resolution 'that the disabilities of women in respect of the Parliamentary franchise ought to be removed by legislation'.
e Women's suffrage amendment to the Government of Ireland Bill.

Appendix II
Analysis of the Liberal, Irish Nationalist and Labour voting in key women's suffrage division between 1867-1913

Date of division	Of Liberal votes – % for	Of Liberal votes – % against	Of total Liberal MPs in House– % voting in division	Of Irish Nat. votes – % for	Of Irish Nat. votes – % against	Of total Irish Nat. MPs in House– % voting in division	Of Labour votes – % for	Of Labour votes – % against	Of total Labour MPs in House– % voting in division
1867a	44.4	55.6	40.0	–	–	–	–	–	–
1870	64.6	35.4	38.9	–	–	–	–	–	–
1870b	32.0	68.0	52.1	–	–	–	–	–	–
1871	46.3	53.7	58.3	–	–	–	–	–	–
1872	48.9	51.1	60.2	–	–	–	–	–	–
1873	47.8	52.2	61.1	–	–	–	–	–	–
1875	54.4	45.6	60.5	66.7	33.3	26.3	–	–	–
1876	50.3	49.7	67.6	64.3	35.7	25.0	–	–	–
1878	58.1	41.9	67.9	70.0	30.0	17.5	–	–	–
1879	53.0	47.0	54.5	60.0	40.0	17.5	–	–	–
1883	63.0	37.0	40.2	83.3	16.7	18.8	–	–	–
1884c	13.1	86.9	82.1	46.2	53.8	20.3	–	–	–
1886	52.9	47.1	41.8	91.0	9.0	38.4	–	–	–
1892	39.9	60.1	65.4	61.1	38.9	21.2	–	-	-
1897	66.1	33.9	62.2	62.1	37.9	35.4	–	–	–
1904d	89.7	10.3	45.3	74.3	25.7	42.2	–	–	–
1908	79.4	20.6	59.3	60.0	40.0	42.2	–	–	–
1910	72.9	27.1	80.3	57.1	42.9	42.7	94.1	5.9	85.0
1911	78.8	21.2	62.9	79.1	20.9	51.2	100.0	–	64.3
1912	61.3	38.7	71.8	10.3	89.7	46.4	100.0	–	59.5
1912e	13.9	86.1	76.5	6.6	93.4	90.5	82.4	17.6	82.9
1913	65.6	34.4	83.4	19.4	80.6	79.8	100.0	–	87.5

a Mill's women's suffrage amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill.
b This vote was taken at the Committee stage of the previous Bill.
c Woodall's women's suffrage amendment to the 1884 Reform Bill.
d Sir Charles McLaren's resolution 'that the disabilities of women in respect of the Parliamentary franchise ought to be removed by legislation'.
e Women's suffrage amendment to the Government of Ireland Bill.

Appendix III
The growth of groups within the Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Association 1909-1914*

Issue of *CUWFA Review*	London	**Outside London**
February 1910	Belgravia and Chelsea; Kensington; Marylebone and Paddington	Bath; Bristol; Dublin; Glasgow; Hull; Liverpool
May 1910	Crystal Palace; Streatham, Brixton and Clapham	
August 1910		Croydon; Oxford; Bridge of Allan; Warwick; Woking
November 1910		West Sussex
January 1911		Cheltenham; Hayling Island; Worcester
April 1911		Droitwich; East Dorset; Southport
July 1911		Bushey; Hitchin; Stevenage; Weston-super-Mare; Worthing
October 1911	Hampstead	Knebworth
January/March 1912		Birmingham; Cambridge; Chester; Christchurch; East Hants; Berkhampstead; Stafford; Kenilworth; Leamington
April/June 1912	St. George's, Hanover Square	North Beds.; Boston; Cirencester; Devizes; N.W. Hants; Plymouth; Purley, Stamford
July/September 1912		Bishops Waltham; Surrey, Berks. and Hants.; Harrow; Portsmouth and District; Yeovil; Treadington
October/December 1912		Brondesbury; Frimley and District; Blackpool; Ashton-Under-Lyne; Limpsfield and Oxted; Reigate; Taunton; Coventry; Rugby; Stratford
January/March 1913		Weymouth
April/June 1913		North Sussex
July/September 1913	Marylebone and Paddington divided into two groups	Bexhill
October/December 1913		Pershore; Rutland; Kineton and Wellesbourne
January/March 1914	Ealing	Altrincham; Birkenhead; Devon and Exeter; Ellesmere; Newark
April/June 1914		Preston
July/September 1914		

* Based on groups reporting to the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*

NOTES

Introduction

[1] Journals of Lady Knightley, 27 November 1885.
[2] Ibid., 1 May 1872.
[3] Hannam, J., ' "I had not been to London": Women's Suffrage – A View from the Regions', in Purvis, J. and Holton, S. S., *Votes for Women*, London, 2000, pp.226-245.
[4] Pugh, M., *March of the Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage, 1866-1914,* Oxford, 2000. Chapter 5 and p.4.
[5] Pankhurst, E. Sylvia *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals*, London, 1931. Reprinted London, 1977; Strachey, R., *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement*, London, 1928. Reprinted London, 1978. Typical autobiographies from both the constitutional and militant sides of the suffrage movement include Fawcett, M., *The Women's Victory – and After: Personal Reminiscences, 1911-1918*, London, 1920; Kenney, A., *Memories of a Militant,* London, 1924; Pankhurst, E., *My Own Story*, London, 1914. Reprinted London, 1979.
[6] In this category are Garner, L., *Stepping Stones to Liberty: Feminist Ideas in the Women's Suffrage Movement 1900-1918*, London, 1984; Holton, S. S., *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900-1918*, Cambridge, 1986; Hume, L. P., *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 1897-1914,* New York, 1982; Liddington, J. and Norris, J., *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement*, London, 1978; Rosen, A., *Rise Up, Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union 1903-1914*, London, 1974; Vellacott, J., *From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage: The Story of Catherine Marshall*, Montreal, 1993. More recent work, in the form of edited collections of articles, includes Eustance C., Ryan, J. and Ugolini, L., eds., *A Suffrage Reader*, London, 2000; Joannou, M. and Purvis, J., eds., *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives*, London, 1998; Purvis, J. and Holton, S. S., eds., *Votes for Women.*
[7] For example, Linklater, A., *An Unhusbanded Life: Charlotte Despard, Suffragette, Socialist and Sinn Feiner*, London, 1980; Pugh, M., *The Pankhursts*, London, 2001; Rubinstein, D., *A Different World for Women: The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, Columbia, 1991.
[8] Holton, S. S., *Suffrage Days*, London, 1996; Liddington, J., *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote*, London, 2006.
[9] Kent, S. K., *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914,* Princeton, 1987.

[10] Burton, A., *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*, Chapel Hill, 1994; Bush, J., *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*, London, 2000. Bush devotes a chapter to the discussion of imperialism, the women's movement and the vote.

[11] Cook, K. and Evans, N., ' "The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band?": The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1890-1918', in John, A. V., ed., *Our Mother's Land: Chapters In Welsh Women's History 1830-1939*, Cardiff, 1991, pp.159-188; Leneman, L., *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*, Aberdeen, 1991. Owens, R. C., *Smashing Times: A History of the Irish Women's Suffrage Movement 1889-1922*, Dublin, 1984; Studies which look at the English regions are Cowman, K., ' "Crossing the Great Divide": Inter-organizational Suffrage Relationships on Merseyside, 1895-1914', in Eustance, C., Ryan, J. and Ugolini, L., eds., *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History*, pp. 37-52; Hannam, J., ' "I had not been to London": Women's Suffrage – A View from the Regions', in Purvis, J. and Holton, S. S., *Votes for Women*, pp.226-245.

[12] Harrison, B., *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain*, London, 1978; John, A. V., and Eustance, C., eds., *The Men's Share: Masculinities, Male Support and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920*, London, 1997.

[13] Morgan, D., *Suffragists and Liberals: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in Britain*, Oxford, 1975; Pugh, M., *Electoral Reform in War and Peace, 1906-1918*, London, 1978; Rover, C., *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866-1914*, London, 1967. A study which looks critically at the suffrage movement's understanding of the workings of representative government is Harrison, B, 'Women's Suffrage at Westminster 1866-1928' in Bentley, M. and Stevenson, J., eds., High and Low Politics in Modern Britain, Oxford, 1983, pp.80-122.

[14] For example, Cowman, Holton, Hume, Rover, Vellacott and to a much greater extent Pugh.

[15] Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People, 1880-1935*, Oxford, 1985, chapter 3. Robb, J., *The Primrose League, 1883-1906*, New York, 1942.

[16] Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, p.66.

[17] Walker, L., 'Party Political Women: A Comparative Study of Liberal Women and the Primrose League, 1890-1914' in Rendall, J., ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 190, 191.

[18] Campbell, B., *The Iron Ladies: Why Do Women Vote Tory?*, London, 1985. The Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG) was founded in 1883 and campaigned on social and political issues on behalf of working-class women. See Gaffin, J. and Thoms, D., *Caring and Sharing: The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild*, Manchester, 1983.

[19] Campbell, B., *The Iron Ladies*, p.34.

[20] Hollis, P., *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1865-1914*, Oxford, 1987, p.58. See pp.123, 136-7, 273, 323, 343-4, 397, 401.

[21] Garner, L., *Stepping Stones to Liberty*, p.19.

[22] Holton, S. S., *Feminism and Democracy*, p.5.

[23] Pugh, M., *March of the Women*, p.4.

[24] Bush, J., *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*; Jalland, P., *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914*, Oxford, 1986; Reynolds, K. D., *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain*, Oxford, 1998;

[25] Jeune, M., Lady St. Helier, *Memories of Fifty Years*, London, 1909; Journals of Lady

Knightley, ref. K2879-2923, Northamptonshire Record Office, Northampton; Selborne Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford; Villiers, M., Countess of Jersey, *Fifty-one Years of Victorian Life*, London, 1922.

[26] Beatrice Cartwright Papers, ref: C(A) boxes 57-9, C(E) 311-351, Northamptonshire Record Office; Emily Davies Papers, Girton College, Cambridge; Lady Jane Strachey Papers, ref: 7/JMS, the Women's Library, formerly the Fawcett Library, London Guildhall University.

[27] Caine, B., *Victorian Feminists*, Oxford, 1992.

[28] Levine, P., *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment,* Oxford, 1990.

[29] Rendall, J., *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*, Basingstoke, 1985, p.1; Caine, B., *English Feminism 1780-1980*, Oxford, 1997, pp.143-145.

[30] Banks, O., *Faces of Feminism*, Oxford, 1986, p.3; Levine, P., *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900*, pp.13-15.

[31] Caine, B., *Victorian Feminists*, p.3.

[32] Lewis, J., *Women and Social Action in Victorian England*, London, 1991, p.307.

[33] For example, Cecil, Lady G., *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*, vols. 1-4, London, 1921-1932. In her important work Lord Salisbury's daughter does include details of her father's family life, but her work lacks a critical edge and is essentially a diplomatic history. Mackay, R. F., *Balfour: Intellectual Statesman*, Oxford, 1985, is an example of a biography where there is an emphasis on defence and foreign policy – the years between 1906 and 1911 receive a total of seven pages.

[34] Roberts, A., *Salisbury: Victorian Titan*, London, 2000, paperback ed., pp.105-111, 503-505, 835.

[35] Egremont, M., *Balfour: A Life of Arthur James Balfour*, London, 1980, pp.13-39, 46-48, 252.

[36] Arthur, 1st Earl of Balfour Papers, British Library; Robert, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood Papers, British Library; Victor, 2nd Earl of Lytton Papers, Knebworth House; Boyce, D. G., ed., *The Crisis of British Unionism: The Domestic Political Papers of the Second Earl of Selborne, 1885-1922*, London, 1987.

[37] Williamson, P., ed., *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics: The Diaries and Letters of William Bridgeman 1904-1935*, London, 1988; Ramsden, J., ed., *Real Old Tory Politics: The Political Diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-35*, London, 1984.

[38] Robert Blake ignores the activities of the League completely, but Bruce Coleman, Peter Marsh and Richard Shannon are more sympathetic to its work in their discussions of Lord Salisbury's administration. See Blake, R., *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*, London, 1985; Coleman, B., *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London, 1988, pp.197-9; Marsh, P., *The Discipline of Popular Government: Lord Salisbury's Domestic Statecraft 1881-1902*, Hassocks, 1978, pp.203-4; Shannon, R., *The Age of Salisbury, 1881-1902: Unionism and Empire*, London, 1996, pp.113-122.

[39] Lovenduski, J., Norris, P. and Burness, C., 'The Party and Women', in Seldon, A. and Ball, S., eds., *Conservative Century*, Oxford, 1994, pp.611-635. Chalus, E., 'Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of late Eighteenth-Century England', *The Historical Journal*, 43, 3, 2000, 669-697.

[40] Lawrence, J., 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1889-1914,

English Historical Review, 108, 1993, 630-652; Jarvis, D., 'The Conservative Party and the Politics of Gender, 1900-1939, in Francis M. and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., eds., *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990,* Cardiff, 1996, pp.172-193. Jarvis has recently looked in detail at the ambivalence of the Conservative Party towards their female supporters in his penetrating survey of their attitude towards women voters after 1918. See Jarvis, D., ' "Behind Every Great Party": Women and Conservatism in Twentieth Century Britain', in Vickery, A., ed., *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present*', Stanford, 2001, pp.289-314.

[41] Lawrence, J., 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1889-1914', 649.

[42] Masson, U., ' "Political Conditions in Wales Are Quite Different . . ." party politics and votes for women in Wales, 1912-1915', *Women's History Review*, 9, 2, 2000, 369-388.

Chapter One

[1] Harris, J., *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain, 1870-1914*, Oxford, 1993, p.188.

[2] These figures are obtained from Cook C. and Stevenson, J., *The Longman Handbook of Modern British History 1714-1987*, London, 1988, 2nd ed., p.68. Despite the substantial increase in the electorate Pugh maintains that 'no more than six out of every ten men, at most, were parliamentary voters before 1914'. See Pugh, M., *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939*, Oxford, 1982, pp.5-6.

[3] James Cornford explains the background to the 1885 Redistribution Act in his article, 'The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Victorian Studies*, September 1963, vii, 1, 35-66.

[4] Technically the League was a non-party organisation, but it always defended Conservative policies and was seen as a party auxiliary. See Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People 1880-1935*, p.17, 27. Journals of Lady Knightley, 12 May 1885.

[5] Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, p.23.

[6] See Cecil, Lord Hugh, *Conservatism*, London, 1912, p.243. Cecil's book was the only major work written on the political philosophy of Conservatism during the first half of the twentieth century; Smith, P., in his introduction to *Lord Salisbury on Politics: A Selection from his Articles in the Quarterly Review, 1860-1883*, Cambridge, 1972, p.28.

[7] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 188, 15 July 1867, col.1539.

[8] The 1870s saw the beginnings of what was known as the 'Great Depression' – a combination of agricultural depression, industrial restructuring and increased foreign competition. There has been debate about the impact of this downturn, but there is no doubt that it caused considerable economic uncertainty. See Green, E. H. H., *The Crisis of Conservatism: The politics, economics and ideology of the British Conservative party, 1880-1914*, London, 1996, pp.28-30, 53-56, 117-118.

[9] George, H., *Progress and Poverty*, New York, 1879*;* Chamberlain, J., *The Radical Programme*, London, 1885.

[10] For a summary of Conservative concerns about the threat to property rights posed by the 1881 Irish Land Act see Green, E. H. H., *The Crisis of Conservatism*, pp.79-80, 85-6, 92.

[11] Tillett, B., *Memories and Reflections*, London, 1931, p.116. For details of the events that led up to the founding of the Labour Party see Thorpe, A., *A History of the British Labour Party*, Basingstoke, 2001, 2nd ed. pp.5-9. H. M. Hyndman founded the SDF, see Tsuzuki, C., *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism*, London, 1961. The members of the Fabian Society were particularly concerned about what they called 'the social evil' of poverty. See MacBriar, A. M., *Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 1884-1918*, Cambridge, 1962, chapter 1.

[12] Figure quoted in M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939*, p.75. Harris discusses the reality of class relationships during this period in *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, pp.6-11.

[13] Examples of important social legislation during this period are the 1870 and 1880 Education Acts, the 1874 Factory Act, the 1875 Public Health Act and the 1875 Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement Act. Although the last three Acts were brought in under a Conservative administration, they were relatively moderate changes – there was never any official party programme of social reform. Barnett, S. and H., *Practicable Socialism*, 1st series, London, 1888; Booth, C., *Life and Labour of the People in London,* 17 vols, 1882-1902, London, 1902. Both Barnett and Booth distinguished between the 'deserving' poor and the 'residuum', the latter being seen as beyond help. Labour or farm colonies would be set up to 'contain' this lowest group in society. The 'social crisis' and Barnett and Booth's ideas are examined in Stedman-Jones, G., *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society,* London, 1984, pp.281-314.

[14] Green, E. H. H., *The Crisis of Conservatism*, pp.14-20.

[15] Cecil, R., 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, 'Disintegration', *Quarterly Review*, 312, October, 1883, 563-565.

[16] Shannon, R., *The Age of Salisbury, 1881-1902: Unionism and Empire*, p.349.

[17] Examples of other leagues which were predominantly Conservative were the National Fair Trade League (1881), and the imperialist Navy League (1895), National Service League (1902) and Imperial Maritime League (1908). The leagues attracted both men and women to their ranks in the confidence 'that their particular issues and remedies were not just desirable, but essential to British power and prosperity'. There is further discussion of women's role in these leagues in chapter four. See Coetzee, F., *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England*, Oxford, 1990, p.162, also pp.3-8.

[18] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 306, 7 June 1886, cols.1240-1246.

[19] Gradually distinctions weakened between the members of the coalition, and the party became widely known as the Unionist Party. In 1912 the parties merged formally to become the Conservative and Unionist Party. The early problems of the Unionist coalition are outlined by Coleman in *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp.175-193.

[20] Jeune, M., Lady St Helier, *Memories of Fifty Years*, pp.210, 243-244.

[21] Kebbel, T. E., *Selected Speeches of the late Right Honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield*, vol. 2, London, 1882, pp.523-35.

[22] Transvaal's war of independence had led to British defeat at Majuba Hill in 1881, while Britain's fear of native uprisings was heightened by the reversals in the Sudan, when Hicks's army was defeated by the Mahdi in 1883 and General Gordon was killed at Khartoum in 1885. In 1885 the Indian National Congress had been founded, with the aim of obtaining a greater measure of self-government for India. See Porter, A., ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*: *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. III, Oxford, 1999, pp.607-8, 632-5, 432-4, 437-8.

[23] From the 1880s the agricultural depression caused a fall in rents, and anti-landlord legislation like the 1881 Irish Land Act exacerbated the problem. Also, death duties were introduced by the Liberal Chancellor, Harcourt, in 1894. José Harris gives a helpful account of some of these trends in *Private Lives, Public Spirit*, pp.100-110, 116-122, pp.201-202.

[24] These changes are outlined in Cannadine, D., *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, London, 1992, revised.ed., pp.182-235; Guttsman, W. L., *The British Political Elite*, London, 1963, p.75-133; Thompson, F. M. L., *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1963, pp.269-326. The statistics are confusing because of the problem of deciding who can legitimately be called a member of the 'landowning class', see Guttsman, p.82.

[25] Cannadine, D., *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p.704. Conservative MPs, traditionally mostly from the landed élite, exemplified this trend. Although from 1885 to 1905 it has been calculated that about 40% of Conservative MPs were from landed families, there was an underlying reduction in numbers after 1900 as many long-serving county members retired and were replaced by Conservative MPs from industrial and commercial backgrounds. See Cornford, J. P., 'The Parliamentary Foundations of the Hotel Cecil', in Robson, R., ed., *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain*, London, 1967, pp. 271-90.

[26] Green, E. H. H., *The Crisis of Conservatism* p.20

[27] Halévy, E., *The Rule of Democracy, 1905-1914*, revised ed., London, 1952, p.441; Powell, D., *The Edwardian Crisis, Britain 1901-14*, Basingstoke, 1996, p.175

[28] See Green, E. H. H., *The Crisis of Conservatism*, p.311-317.

[29] For example, Ellis, S. S., *The Wives of England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence & Social Obligations*, London, 1843; Lamb, A. R., *Can Women Regenerate Society?*, London, 1844; Lewis, S., *Woman's Mission*, London, 1839; Reid, M., *A Plea for Woman*, Edinburgh, 1843; Sandford, Mrs J., *Woman in Her Social and Domestic Character*, London, 1831.

[30] Rousseau, J. J., *Émile* (1762), intro. Jimack, P. D., London, 1992; Wollstonecraft, M., *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ed. and intro. Brody, M., Harmondsworth, 1975.

[31] Catherine Hall has taken this approach in *White, Male and Middle Class,* Cambridge, 1992, pp.75-93.

[32] A. Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *Historical Journal*, 36, 2, 1993, 411.

[33] Digby, A., 'Victorian Values and Women in Public and Private' in Smout, T.. C., ed., *Victorian Values*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 78, Oxford, 1992, p.196.

[34] For a detailed examination of women's philanthropic activities see Prochaska, F. K., *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*, Oxford 1980.

[35] Cobbe, F. P., 'Social Science Congresses, and Women's Part in Them', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 5, December, 1861, 81-94.

[36] For example, the Ladies' Sanitary Association (1857), Workhouse Visiting Society (1858), Female Middle Class Emigration Society (1862), Girls' Friendly Society (1874), Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants (1875), etc.

[37] Hubbard, L., 'Statistics of Women's Work', *Woman's Mission: A Series of Congress Papers on the Philanthropic Work of Women by Eminent Writers*, ed., Baroness Burdett-Coutts, London, 1893, pp.361-6.

[38] The standard text on women's local government work remains Hollis, P., *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914.*

[39] The law of 'coverture' is discussed in Shanley, M. L., *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895*, Princeton, 1989, pp.3-21. In Scotland women gained the municipal vote as late as 1882, while in Ireland the situation was more complex. For example, although women in Belfast secured the local franchise in 1887, other Irish women had to wait until the Local Government Act of 1898 to obtain the

local vote and the right to stand for office. Details of these variations can be found in Rendall, J., 'The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867' in Hall, C., Rendall, J. and McClelland, K., *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867*, Cambridge, 2000, pp.157-160.

[40] Hollis, P., *Ladies Elect*, p.486.

[41] For example, the social reforms of the 1870s, as outlined earlier in note 55, p.17.

[42] Hollis, P., *Ladies Elect*, p.472

[43] See Lacey, C. A. ed., *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group*, London, 1987. Other members of the core group were Isa Craig, Adelaide Procter and Maria Rye. Two women with Conservative affiliations who were associated with the group were Emily Faithfull, who founded the Victoria Press in 1860, and Frances Power Cobbe, the writer and social reformer.

[44] See Holcombe, L., *Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law in Nineteenth-Century England*, Toronto, 1983, pp.54, 106, 119, 148-205.

[45] The problem of the 'surplus woman' was raised by W. R. Greg in 'Why Are Women Redundant?', *National Review*, 14, April 1862, 434-60. The 1851 Census had revealed that for every 1,000 men there were 1,042 women in England and Wales. See Mitchell, B. R., *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, Cambridge, 1962, p.6.

[46] Beale, D., 'The Ladies' College at Cheltenham' from the Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 1865, in Hollis, P. ed., *Women in Public, 1850-1900: Documents of the Victorian Women's Movement*, London, 1979, pp.137-8.

[47] See Fletcher, S., *Feminists and Bureaucrats: A Study in the Development of Girls' Education in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1980.

[48] For example, the North London Collegiate School was founded in 1850, Cheltenham Ladies' College in 1854, and later, St Leonard's in 1877 and Roedean in 1885. The Girls' Public Day School Company was founded in 1871 and more about its schools can be found in Kamm, J., *Indicative Past: A Hundred Years of The Girls' Public Day School Trust*, London, 1971. The Taunton Schools Inquiry Commission took evidence from prominent women like Beale and Davies and concluded that 'the state of Middle-Class Female education is, on the whole, unfavourable . . .' The result was the passing of the Endowed Schools Act in 1869, which set aside endowments for schools for girls. See Kamm, J., *Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History*, London, 1965, pp.199-213.

[49] Maudsley, H., 'Sex in Mind and in Education', *Fortnightly Review*, 21, April 1874, 466-83.

[50] Raikes, E., *Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham*, London, 1908, p.87.

[51] Levine, P., *Feminist Lives: Private Roles and Public Commitment*, p.140. The institution that became Girton College was founded in 1869, while Newnham College was established in 1875. Somerville College and Lady Margaret Hall opened in 1879. The forerunners of these colleges were two pioneering establishments set up primarily for the benefit of governesses – Queens College in 1848 and Bedford College in 1849. The latter was attended by some of the women of the Langham Place Circle and eventually became a university college.

[52] The University of London admitted women to degrees in 1878, Oxford in 1920, and, amazingly, Cambridge in 1948. In 1879 the Royal University of Ireland awarded women degrees, followed by Scottish universities in 1892 and the University of Wales in 1893.

[53] McWilliams-Tullberg, R., 'Women and Degrees at Cambridge University, 1862-1897', in Vicinus, M., ed., *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women,*

London, paperback ed. 1980, pp.117-145.
[54] Pedersen, J. S., 'Some Victorian Headmistresses: A Conservative Tradition of Social Reform', *Victorian Studies*, 24, Summer 1981, 463-488 (482-4, 487-8).
[55] Quoted in Kamm, J., *How Different From Us: A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale*, London, 1958, p.195.
[56] The campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts has been detailed in Walkowitz, J., *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, Cambridge, 1980; for the issue of temperance see Shiman, L., *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England*, Basingstoke, 1988, pp.182-8.
[57] Rendall, J., 'The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867', p.129. Although the organised movement for women's suffrage dates from the mid 1860s, there were Chartist and Unitarian women who had called for female enfranchisement during the 1830s and 40s. See Gleadle, K., *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51*, Basingstoke, 1995, chapter 3.
[58] Mill, J. S., 'The Subjection of Women' (1869), in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. and intro. Gray, J., Oxford, 1991, pp.471-582. In writing this work Mill drew on the thinking of his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill, who had published 'The Enfranchisement of Women' in the *Westminster Review*, 55, July 1851, 239-311.
[59] For example, the Conservative suffragist and member of the Langham Place Circle Jessie Boucherett was enthusiastic about *The Subjection of Women*, and she wrote to Helen Taylor (Mill's stepdaughter) that it had given her 'much pleasure' to read. Boucherett to Taylor, 14 June 1869, Mill-Taylor Correspondence, London School of Economics. Quoted in Crawford, E., *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*, London, 1999, p.412. The Conservative Lady Jane Strachey acknowledged Mill's influence in her speech at the Lyceum Club, 28 January 1907. Lady Jane Strachey Papers, ref: 7/JMS. Mill, J. S., 'Considerations on Representative Government' (1861) in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. and intro. Gray, J., Oxford, 1991, pp.203-467. Refs. on pp. 330-31.
[60] The Kensington Society was a debating society for women founded in 1865. In its first year it recruited 58 members, some of whom were members of the Langham Place Circle. They included Barbara Bodichon, Jessie Boucherett, Frances Power Cobbe, Emily Davies, the pioneer doctor Sophia Jex Blake, and the headmistress Dorothea Beale. Interestingly, all these women, except Bodichon, had Conservative sympathies.The topic discussed at the second meeting on 21 November 1865 was 'Is the extension of the Parliamentary suffrage to women desirable, and, if so, under what conditions?' It was this debate that led to the suffrage petition being organised. See Rosen, A., 'Emily Davies and the Women's Movement, 1862-1867', in *Journal of British Studies*, 19, i, Fall 1979, 101-121.
[61] Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, (from now on HC is used to indicate the House of Commons, and HL the House of Lords, and references will be abbreviated, e.g. HC Debates), 3rd series, vol. 187, 20 May 1867, cols. 817-829.
[62] These bills were introduced every year from 1870 to 1879, except for 1874.
[63] Details of the early suffrage committees can be found in Rendall, J., 'The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867', pp.133-40.
[64] Pugh, M., *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939*, Oxford, 1982, p.7. The emphasis on the male voter is discussed in McClelland, K., 'England's Greatness, the Working Man', in Hall, C., Rendall, J. and McClelland, K., *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867*, pp.71-118.
[65] Rendall, J., 'The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867', pp.120-1.

[66] From the very beginning of the suffrage campaign the inclusion of married women was disputed, see Rosen, A., 'Emily Davies and the Women's Movement, 1862- 1867', 111-121.
[67] Rendall, J., 'The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867', p.163.
[68] See Burton, A., *Burdens of History*, pp.6-8, 17, 39, 210-1.
[69] Rendall, J., 'The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867', p.176.
[70] Figures taken from Harrison, B., *Separate Spheres*, pp.28-9. Harrison provides a useful analysis of voting figures for all House of Commons divisions on women's suffrage between 1867-1928. These figures are the main source of information for the tables in the Appendices.
[71] Vickery, A., 'Introduction', in *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present*, ed. Vickery, A., Stanford, 2001, p.31.
[72] Cannadine, D., *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, pp.8-25.
[73] Bush, M. L., *The English Aristocracy: A Comparative Synthesis*, Manchester, 1984, p.4.
[74] Cannadine, D., *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p.7.
[75] Reynolds, K. D., *Aristocratic Women and Political Society*, pp.1-3.
[76] See Gerard, J., 'Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Classes and Rural Philanthropy', *Victorian Studies*, 30, 2, Winter 1987, 183-209.
[77] Cartwright, J., (ed.), *The Journals of Lady Knightley of Fawsley*, London, 1915, pp.xi-xix.
[78] Gerard, J., 'Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Classes and Rural Philanthropy', 209
[79] Cornwallis-West, Mrs G., *The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill*, London, 1908, pp.123-7; Nevill, R., ed., *The Reminiscences of Lady Dorothy Nevill*, London, 1906, p.34. Using the journals of Lady Knightley, Peter Gordon has described her canvassing activities in 'Lady Knightley and the South Northamptonshire election of 1885', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 6, 5, 1981-2, 265-273.
[80] Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, p. 45.
[81] Reynolds, K. D., *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain*, pp.154, 187.
[82] Gordon, P., ed., *Politics and Society: The Journals of Lady Knightley of Fawsley 1885 to 1913*, Northampton, 1999, pp.44-45.
[83] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 187, 20 May 1867, cols. 843-845. Gore Langton also supported the suffrage bills of 1870, 1871, 1872; Gurney supported the 1870 and 1871 bills. Further details of the suffrage bills of the 1870s can be found in chapter three.
[84] E. Davies to H. Taylor, 6 August 1866, Mill-Taylor Collection, XIII, 183, LSE. Quoted in Rosen, A., 'Emily Davies and the Women's Movement', p.112.
[85] Davies writing to Anna Richardson, quoted in Stephen, B., *Emily Davies and Girton College*, London, 1927, p.119. A new committee was set up shortly afterwards, which became the London National Society for Women's Suffrage.
[86] Caine has analysed the ideas and strategies adopted by Davies in more depth, see *Victorian Feminists*, p.101-2.
[87] Ibid., p.59.

Chapter Two

[1] 'The state of the opposition' in *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 32, November 1882, 668-676. Article signed by 'Two Conservatives' who are generally held to be John Gorst and Henry Drummond-Wolff speaking on behalf of Lord Randolph Churchill. The Fourth

Party was set up because of dissatisfaction with the Conservative leadership and organisation, and consisted of Churchill, Gorst, Drummond-Wolff and Arthur Balfour. See Robb, J., *The Primrose League 1883-1906*, pp.23-34.

[2] The standard work on the League is Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People, 1880-1935*, but the first important study was by Robb.

[3] *The Times*, 9 April 1883, p.8.

[4] From a Primrose League Declaration of Associate, records of the Lowther Habitation 1899, Cumbria Record Office.

[5] Primrose League Grand Council minutes, 15 December 1883, MS PL/1, Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

[6] Robb, J., *The Primrose League*, p.49. T. A. Jenkins looks at the issue of Liberal Radicalism in *Gladstone, Whiggery* and *the Liberal Party 1874-1886*, Oxford, 1988. During the early 1880s the Liberal Party contained a group of radical MPs who supported such causes as Church disestablishment and non-denominational education – 'a body of back-bench opinion characterised by its dislike of social privilege and its distrust of the Executive' (Jenkins, p.191). During this period the main challenge to the aristocratic Whig leadership of the Liberal Party came from a group of radicals led by Chamberlain, whose *Radical Programme* of 1885 advocated a 'municipal socialism' which included such ideas as working class housing and land reform.

[7] Cecil, R., 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, 'Disintegration', 574.

[8] Mallock, W. H., 'Socialism in England', *Quarterly Review*, 156, 312, October 1883, 353-393.

[9] *Primrose League Gazette*, 4 February 1888, p.7.

[10] Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, p.17.

[11] Ibid., p.17, and Campbell, B., *The Iron Ladies: Why Do Women Vote Tory?*, p.10.

[12] Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, p.42. Pugh also examines membership figures and analyses the strength of female membership, pp.25-28, 48-49.

[13] Grand Council minutes, 15 December 1883, MS PL/1.

[14] Ladies' Grand Council minutes, 2 March 1885, MS PL/10, Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Library, Oxford. The President was the Duchess of Marlborough, and other members of the LGC included Lady Jersey, Lady Borthwick (wife of the proprietor of the *Morning Post*), Lady Dorothy Nevill, and Lady Randolph Churchill. Several of these were well-known Conservative political hostesses.

[15] Robb, J., *The Primrose League*, p.112.

[16] Campbell, B., *The Iron Ladies*, p.33.

[17] Lovenduski, J., Norris, P., and Burness, C., 'The Party and Women', in Seldon, A. and Ball, S., eds, *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900*, p.618.

[18] Local government provided an opportunity for involvement in political life, but Conservative women were slow to respond. Female activists in local politics were usually from a Liberal background with an attachment to progressive causes. The participation of Conservative women in local government is discussed later in this chapter.

[19] Marsh, P., *The Discipline of Popular Government:: Lord Salisbury's Domestic Statecraft, 1881-1902*, p.204.

[20] Lawrence, J., 'The British Sense of Class', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 2, 2000, 307-318.

[21] Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, p.148.

[22] *Primrose League Gazette*, 1 October 1894, p.5; 1 June 1895, p.5.

[23] Ibid., 2 December 1895, p.11.
[24] Ibid., p.11.
[25] Walker, L., 'The Women's Movement in England in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Manchester, 1984, p.46.
[26] The Contagious Diseases Acts were enacted in the 1860s, and required prostitutes who frequented military and naval barracks to submit to compulsory intimate medical inspections for venereal disease. After a successful campaign led by the Liberal Josephine Butler the Acts were repealed in 1886. See Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*.
[27] The Women's Liberal Federation was founded in 1887 as an 'umbrella' organization for the Women's Liberal Associations. Report of the Annual Meeting of the Women's Liberal Federation, 22 May, 1889, p.15. Women's Liberal Federation Archive, University of Bristol Library.
[28] Examples of such Conservative speeches can be found in the *Primrose League Gazette*, 5 May 1888, p.9, 1 June 1894, pp.3-4, 1 September 1899, p.18, 1 June 1900, p.18, etc. The Liberal examples come from the Report of the WLF Annual Meeting, 17-18 May, 1892.
[29] This split in the WLF is discussed in more detail in Hirshfield, C., 'Fractured Faith: Liberal Party Women and the Suffrage Issue in Britain, 1892-1914', *Gender & History*, 2, 2, Summer, 1990, 173-197.
[30] *Primrose League Gazette*, 1 April 1896, pp.6-7.
[31] Minutes of the WLF Annual Council Meeting, 9 June 1896.
[32] Sheets, Diana E., 'British Conservatism and the Primrose League: The Changing Character of Popular Politics 1883-1901', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1986, p.4. *Primrose League Gazette*, 19 November 1887, p.4.
[33] *Primrose League Gazette*, 29 October 1887, p.3.
[34] Ladies' Grand Council Executive Committee minutes, 13 November 1885, MS PL/10.
[35] *Primrose League Gazette*, 19 May 1888, p.3. The new legislation establishing County Councils was known as the Local Government Act, 1888.
[36] Journals of Lady Knightley, 27 November 1885.
[37] *Primrose League Gazette*, 15 September 1888, p.12.
[38] The two women who stood for election to the London County Council (LCC) as a test case were successful, and took their seats early in 1889. However, legal cases brought by two members of the Conservative Party in 1889 and 1891 deprived the women of office. The Society for Promoting Women as County Councillors was established on a 'non-party basis' in November 1888, and became the Women's Local Government Society (WLGS) in 1893. Although the WLGS had a mainly Liberal membership the Conservative suffragist Lady Jane Strachey was both Chairman and President for many years. Patricia Hollis has written about the WLGS in *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914*, pp.306-336.
[39] Ladies' Grand Council Executive Committee minutes, 7 December 1888, MS PL/11.
[40] *The Times* of 21 May 1889, p.9, argued that although there appeared to be a case in favour of the women, the Peers were merely voicing their disapproval of Lord Salisbury's support for women's suffrage the previous year.
[41] Lydia Becker (1827-1890) was the founder (in 1867) and secretary of the Manchester Women's Suffrage Committee. From 1870 until her death she edited the *Women's*

Suffrage Journal. Millicent Fawcett (1847-1928) was active in the women's suffrage movement from the 1860s until 1928. First a Liberal, and then a Liberal Unionist, she confessed that she preferred not to support any particular political party. In 1897 she became president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, which united the existing societies into one organisation, a position she held until 1919.

[42] *Primrose League Gazette*, 8 December 1888, p.2.

[43] *Morning Post*, 1 December 1888, p.2. Lord Salisbury's speech will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

[44] *The Times*, 4 January 1889, p.7.

[45] Lawrence, J., 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914', 628-652.

[46] *The Times*, 21 May 1889, p.9.

[47] 'An Appeal Against Women's Suffrage', *Nineteenth Century*, 25, 1889, 781-788. Ibid., 26, 1889, 353-384.

[48] One of the signatories was a Lady Strachey, but not the Lady Jane Strachey, wife of Sir Richard Strachey, who was a suffragist and is mentioned frequently in this thesis. The anti-suffragist Lady Strachey was her sister-in-law. Julia Bush examined the Appeal in more detail in her unpublished paper, 'The 1889 Appeal Against Women's Suffrage: A Reassessment'.

[49] Ibid., 25, 782.

[50] Unattributed quote in Harrison, B., *Separate Spheres*, p.116

[51] Ibid., pp.81-2. Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, p.43.

[52] Ladies' Grand Council minutes, 19 May 1890, MS PL/12.

[53] *Primrose League Gazette*, 13 April 1889, p.1.

[54] *Fortnightly Review*, 52, 1889, 123-139.

[55] Ibid., p.129.

[56] Journals of Lady Knightley, 29 June 1889.

[57] *Fortnightly Review*, 52, 1889, 131.

[58] *Primrose League Gazette*, 19 October 1889, p.7.

[59] Ibid., 2 April 1892, p.10. The speaker may have been the same Mrs Stanbury who was secretary of the Women's Local Government Society.

[60] Ibid., 19 May 1888, p.3.

[61] *The Times*, 16 July 1891, p.10; ibid., 24 October 1891, p.6; ibid., 25 November 1891, p.10.

[62] *Primrose League Gazette*, 26 December 1891, p.4. Harriet McIlquham had links with radical suffragists and with Gloucestershire Conservatives. She was a wealthy, propertied woman, who became active in local government, becoming a poor law guardian , a parish councillor, and a member of a school board.

[63] *Primrose League Gazette*, 29 October 1892, p.11.

[64] Ibid., 17 December 1892, p.10.

[65] Ibid., 1 January 1894, p.12, 1 February 1894, p.16.

[66] Ibid., 1 June 1896, pp.2-3. In 1895 the Liberal Unionist leaders entered into a coalition with the Salisbury government, and the name 'Conservative' began to be replaced by 'Unionist' to denote the new formal alliance.

[67] Ibid., 1 November 1895, p.4.

[68] Ibid., 1 June 1896, pp.2-3.

[69] Ladies' Grand Council Executive Committee minutes, 19 March 1897, MS PL/13.

[70] Campbell, B., *The Iron Ladies*, p.34.

[71] Hollis, Patricia, *Ladies' Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914,* pp.47-68, 136.
[72] Harris, José, 'The Transition to High Politics in English Social Policy, 1880-1914', in *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain*, eds., Bentley, M. and Stevenson, J., Oxford, 1983, pp.58-79. Hollis, P., *Ladies Elect*, p.58.
[73] *Primrose League Gazette*, 5 May 1888, p.9.
[74] Hollis, P., *Ladies Elect*, pp.75-88, p.133, p.136, pp.175-176.
[75] Ibid., pp.13-14, 203, 206, 267, 279-280, 282, and 294. Most of the information about Lonsdale can be found in Martineau, V., *Recollections of Miss Sophia Lonsdale*, London, 1936. Hollis has assumed that she was a Conservative, although it is not clearly stated in the *Recollections*. Lonsdale was the daughter of Canon of Lichfield and was on the Administrative Central Council of the Charity Organization Society. She had Liberal as well as Conservative friends, including Emma Cons, a suffragist and the first LCC female alderman.
[76] Ibid., pp.224, 137.
[77] Young, Ken, *Local Politics and the Rise of Party: The London Municipal Society and the Conservative Intervention in Local Elections 1894-1963*, Leicester, 1975, pp.44-5.
[78] Hollis, P., *Ladies' Elect*, pp.65-6, 241-6, 486. The Women's Co-operative Guild was founded in 1883, initially as a 'trade union' for working class married women. The membership came mainly from N.W. England, and by 1900 nearly 13,000 Women belonged to the organisation. In 1894 members passed a resolution in favour of women's suffrage. See Gaffin, Jean and Thoms, David, *Caring and Sharing: The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild*, Manchester, 1983.
[79] Report of the Annual Meeting of the Council of the WLF, 1 May 1894.
[80] Quoted in Hollis, P., *Ladies' Elect*, p.243.
[81] Young, K., *Local Politics and the Rise of Party,* pp.64-5.
[82] An explanation of the terms 'Moderate' and 'Progressive' can be found in Ken Young's *Local Politics and the Rise of Party*, pp.38-9. The politics of the London School Board election of 1894 are well described in 'London Progressives v. London Education', by Joseph Diggle (the Moderate leader), in *The National Review*, 141, November 1894, 307-315.
[83] Ladies' Grand Council Executive Committee minutes, 27 July 1894, MS PL/13. *Primrose League Gazette*, 1 November 1894, p.3.
[84] Hollis, P., *Ladies' Elect*, p.123.
[85] Ladies' Grand Council Executive Committee minutes, 9 December 1892, MS PL/12.
[86] Quoted in Shannon, R., *The Age of Salisbury*, 1881-1902, p.120.
[87] The Charity Organization Society was formed to co-ordinate the work of charitable societies, but became a movement to promote ideas of individual responsibility. See Charles Loch Mowat's *The Charity Organisation Society*, London, 1961.The Girls' Friendly Society was an Anglican organisation dedicated to supporting respectable working girls – Lady Knightley was a prominent member. Brian Harrison has written an article about the Society, 'For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls' Friendly Society 1874-1920, in *Past & Present*, 61, November 1973, 107-138. The National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) was an organisation that brought together women from all political backgrounds who worked in the philanthropic field. The history of the NUWW can be found in Daphne Glick's *The National Council of Women of Great Britain: The First One Hundred Years*, London, 1995.

[88] For a fuller discussion of the 'domestic' factor in Conservative politics see Lawrence, J., 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism', 645-652.
[89] The following figures are taken from Walker, L., 'The Women's Movement in England in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', p.13.

Year	Knights	Dames	Associates	Total Members	Total Habs.
1884	747	153	57	957	46
1886	32,645	23,381	181,257	237,283	1,200
1890	60,795	48,796	801,261	910,852	2,081
1900	74,461	64,003	1,380,097	1,518,561	2,380

Chapter Three

[1] For an overview of the history of party political attitudes to the question of women's suffrage see Rover, C, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain 1866-1914*.
[2] The 1867 Reform Bill almost doubled the electorate – from 1,310,000 to 2,500,000 voters, out of a total population of approx. 31,000,000 in the UK.
[3] Cecil, R., Viscount Cranborne, later 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, 'The Conservative Surrender', *Quarterly Review*, 246, October 1867, 534.
[4] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol.187, 20 May 1867, c. 818.
[5] Cobbe, F. P., 'Why Women Desire the Franchise' (1874), in Lewis, J., ed., *Before the Vote was Won: Arguments for and against Women's Suffrage 1864-1896*, London, 1987, pp.179-183.
[6] The figures are taken from Harrison, B., *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain*, pp.28-29. See Appendices.
[7] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 99, 20 June 1848, col. 950; Rover, C., *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866-1914*, p.103. Disraeli voted for women's suffrage bills in 1871, 1872 (paired), 1873, 1875 and 1876, at which point he became Lord Beaconsfield.
[8] Journals of Lady Knightley, 8 December 1908.
[9] Cartwright, J., ed., *The Journals of Lady Knightley of Fawsley*, p.xviii.
[10] Coleman, B., *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p.159.
[11] The eleven Conservative MPs were W. W. B. Beach, W. H. Barrow, J. Gorst, A. Grant, R. B. Harvey, W. Gore Langton, hon. H. G. Liddell (later Lord Ebrington), hon. Major G. Morgan (later Lord Tredegar), hon. P. Wyndham, J. R. Yorke, rt. hon. R. Gurney.
[12] For details of these divisions see table 1, and for a more detailed picture see the Appendices.
[13] This was the legal ruling in the case of Regina v. Harrold in 1872, which excluded married women ratepayers from the borough municipal register.
[14] Letter from Becker to Forsyth, 28 May 1874, reproduced in Blackburn, H., *Women's Suffrage: A Record of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the British Isles,* London, 1902, reprinted in Mulvey Roberts, M. and Mizuta, T., eds., *The Disenfranchised: The Fight for the Suffrage*, London, 1993, pp.137-139.
[15] Holton, S. S., *Suffrage Days*, p.41.
[16] Blackburn, H., *Women's Suffrage: A Record of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the*

British Isles, repr.1993, pp.139-145.
[17] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 240, 19 June 1878, col. 1870.
[18] Ibid., 19 June 1878, cols. 1816, 1822-1823.
[19] Harrison, B., *Separate Spheres*, pp.27, 35.
[20] For the figures for all parties see table 1. More extensive analysis can be found in the Appendices.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Blackburn, H., *Women's Suffrage: A Record of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the British Isles,* repr. 1993, pp.142-3. Also Rover, C., *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain*, p.104.
[23] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 289, 12 June 1884, col.198.
[24] Three resolutions in favour of women's suffrage had been brought before the Commons in 1881, 1882 and 1883 by the Liberal MP Hugh Mason. Only one resolution, that of 1883, was voted on, and it was defeated by 16 votes.
[25] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 289, 10 June, col. 1942.
[26] Journals of Lady Knightley, 10 June 1884.
[27] Ibid., 10 June 1884.
[28] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 289, 10 June 1884, cols. 1956, 1959.
[29] Ibid., col. 1962.
[30] Constance Rover expands on Gladstone's anti-suffrage views in *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain*, pp.118-120.
[31] Pugh, M., *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939*, p.20. Pugh has a useful discussion on the changes in the House of Commons after 1867, and the evolution of the role of the backbench MP, pp.17-21.
[32] Journals of Lady Knightley, 12 June 1884; HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 289, 12 June 1884, cols. 113-114.
[33] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 289, 12 June 1884, col. 204.
[34] Journals of Lady Knightley, 12 June 1884. Lady Knightley may have forgotten the tellers, since the published figures were 137 in favour of the amendment and 273 against.
[35] For voting figures see Appendices. Note: There were more votes against women's suffrage in the division on 5 December 1912, but this was on an amendment to the Government of Ireland Bill.
[36] Raikes, H. C., 'Women's Suffrage', *National Review*, 23, January 1885, 631-641.
[37] Ibid., 640-641, 634.
[38] Ibid., 637-638
[39] Ibid., 633, 635, 641.
[40] Vernon Smith, P., 'Women's Suffrage: A Reply', *National Review*, 25, March 1885, 60-70.
[41] Ibid., 61, 69.
[42] Ibid., 66; Raikes, H. C., 'Women's Suffrage', 635.
[43] Lord Salisbury was Prime Minister from 1885-6, 1886-1892, and 1895-1902.
[44] *The Morning Post*, 1 December 1888, p.2.
[45] Shannon, R., *The Age of Salisbury, 1881-1902: Unionism and Empire*, p.163.
[46] *The Times*, 16 July 1891, p.10.
[47] Ibid., 24 October 1891, p.6.
[48] Ibid., 30 April 1896, p.8.
[49] Journals of Lady Knightley, 25 May 1889.
[50] Balfour, Lady F., *Ne Obliviscaris: Dinna Forget*, vol. 2, p.148.

[51] See Appendices for details of this division. The failed attempts to get a bill or resolution heard are listed in Rover, C., *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain*, pp.219-220.
[52] Blackburn, H., *Women's Suffrage: A Record of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the British Isles*, repr. 1993, pp.191-201.
[53] Patricia Hollis in *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914*, p.31, has estimated a figure of 651,000 women eligible to vote by 1889. She gives figures for women serving on Boards of Guardians and School Boards in England and Wales on p.486. For 1890 she has estimated approximate figures of 100 women on School Boards and 80 on Boards of Guardians.
[54] National Union Conference minutes, Birmingham, November 1891, NUA 2/1, Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Also *The Times*, 25 November, 1891, p.10. Pugh has claimed that the 1889 conference also voted in favour, but I can find no evidence of this.
[55] Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, p.59.
[56] The National Union were to vote in favour of women's suffrage at future annual meetings in 1894, 1907, 1908 and 1910. The Scottish Annual Conference did the same in 1887, 1889, 1892 and 1896.
[57] HC Debates, 4th series, vol. 3, 27 April 1892, col. 1460.
[58] Quoted in Holton, S. S., *Suffrage Days*, p.85.
[59] Levine, P., *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900*, London, 1987, p.61, 18.
[60] Balfour, A. J. , *Chapters of Autobiography*, London, 1930, pp.127-128.
[61] The background to the 'Newcastle Programme' is described in Bulmer-Thomas, I., *The Growth of the British Party System, 1640-1923*, vol. 1, London, 1967, p.149- 151.
[62] A speech by Lady Knightley dealing mainly with Irish Home Rule, and quoted in the *Banbury Guardian*, 23 June 1892. The attempt by Gladstone to reintroduce Home Rule was defeated in the House of Lords in September 1893.
[63] HC Debates, 4th series, vol. 3, 27 April 1892, cols. 1529-1530.
[64] Ibid., 27 April 1892, cols. 1510 and 1526.
[65] The letter is reproduced in Lewis, J., ed., *Before the Vote Was Won: Arguments for and against Women's Suffrage, 1864-1896*, London, 1987, pp.443-447.
[66] HC Debates, 4th series, vol. 3, 27 April 1892, cols. 1489, 1492-1493.
[67] For an analysis of the division see Appendices. The figures now include the Liberal Unionist vote. The Liberal Unionist leaders were strongly anti-suffragist, for example, Joseph Chamberlain and his son Austen, and Lord Hartington (who became the Duke of Devonshire in 1891) were opponents. However, Leonard Courtney and Viscount Wolmer (who had married Lord Salisbury's daughter Maud in 1883, and became the Earl of Selborne in 1895, at which point he joined his father-in-law's government) were committed suffragists. See Rover, C., *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain*, pp.115-117.
[68] Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, p.60.
[69] Journals of Lady Knightley, 27 April 1892.
[70] The unsuccessful attempts to get a bill, amendment or resolution heard are listed in Rover, C., *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain*, pp.219-220.
[71] National Union Conference minutes, Newcastle-on-Tyne, November 1894, NUA 2/1.
[72] Shannon, R., *The Age of Salisbury, 1881-1902: Unionism and Empire*, pp.434- 435.
[73] HC Debates, 4th series, vol. 45, 3 February 1897, col. 1174.
[74] Ibid., col. 1175.

[75] *The Times*, 4 February 1897, p.9.
[76] HC Debates, 4th series, vol. 45, 3 February 1897, col. 1226.
[77] *The Times*, 4 February 189, p.10..
[78] Burton, Antoinette, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*, p.172.
[79] HC Debates, 4th series, vol. 45, 3 February 1897, cols. 1195-1196, 1214.
[80] Blackburn, H., *Women's Suffrage: A Record of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the British Isles,* repr. 1993, p.197-201, 207-208.
[81] See Appendices.
[82] *Primrose League Gazette*, 2 May 1898, p.8
[83] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 131, 16 March 1904, col. 1367.
[84] Details of the fate of these resolutions can be found in Rover, C., *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866-1914*, p.221.
[85] Blackburn, H., *Women's Suffrage: A Record of the Women's Suffrage Movement the British Isles,* repr. 1993, pp.215-216. The story of the Lancashire women's petition is in Liddington, J. and Norris, J., *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, pp.143-149.
[86] Hollis, P., *Ladies Elect*, pp.344, 348. Beatrice Willoughby was a member of the Marylebone vestry.
[87] An account of Conservative attitudes to London local government can be found in Ken Young's *Local Politics and the Rise of Party*, chapters 1 and 2.
[88] HL Debates, 4th series, vol. 73, 26 June 1899, col. 546.
[89] Ibid., cols. 550-551.
[90] Ibid., cols. 552-554.
[91] Interestingly, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and six bishops voted for the right of women to stand for election to the new councils, while no Lords Spiritual voted against. Ibid., cols 563-566.
[92] *The Times*, 7 July 1899, p.9.
[93] Hollis, P., *Ladies Elect*, p.486. Under the new Act Lady Knightley was co-opted on to the Northamptonshire Education Committee in 1903, together with a prominent Liberal activist, Mrs Pearce Sharman. Journals of Lady Knightley, 25 July 1903.
[94] More about the political implications of the 1902 Education Act can be found in Shannon, R., *The Age of Salisbury, 1881-1902*, pp.546-548.
[95] Mrs Bamford Slack, a prominent Liberal, commented in a WLF pamphlet in July 1903 that, 'we cannot fail to imagine that it is the intention of official and reactionary Conservatives to make a clean sweep of women from all public life'.
[96] Speech to the Sesame Club, October 1904. Papers of Lady Jane Strachey, 7/JMS.
[97] Goldwin Smith, 'Conservatism and Female Suffrage', *National Review*, 60, February 1888, 735-752.
[98] Tosh, J., 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 38, 1994, 179-202.
[99] Eustance, C., 'Protests From Behind the Grille: Gender and the Transformation of Parliament, 1867-1918', p.113.
[100] Letter from Balfour to Christabel Pankhurst, 23 October 1907, Balfour Papers. Balfour Add. 49793, pp.19-24.

Chapter Four

[1] The South African War referred to here was the second war to have been fought against the Boers. The first was between 1880 and 1881, while the second began in

1899 and ended in 1902. The poor health of army recruits led to the government instituting an investigation which resulted in the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1904. The widespread existence of poverty and deprivation had been revealed in the social surveys of Booth, C., *Life and Labour of the People in London*, and Rowntree, S., *Poverty: A Study in Town Life*, London, 1901.
[2] Trade union membership grew from 1,576,000 in 1892 to 2,513,000 in 1901. The formation of the LRC is described in Thorpe, A., *A History of the British Labour Party*. The 'New Liberalism' was a more 'collectivist' approach to social policy, advocated by Liberal intellectuals J. A. Hobson and L. T. Hobhouse, and adopted by Liberal politicians like Lloyd George and Churchill. A useful study of the development of 'new' Liberal ideas about social policy is H. V. Emy's *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics 1892-1914*, Cambridge, 1973, particularly pp.104-141. A more general overview can be found in Bernstein, G. L., *Liberalism and Liberal Politics in Edwardian England*, London, 1986, pp.96-7.
[3] More about these events can be found in Blake, R., *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*, pp.167-184.
[4] Green, E. H. H., *The Crisis of Conservatism*, pp.19-23.
[5] Details of the founding of some of these pressure groups can be found in Frans Coetzee's *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England*. A short but useful contribution is Anne Summers's 'The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues', in Kennedy, P. and Nicholls, A. eds., *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914*, London, 1981, pp. 68-87.
[6] Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Victoria League, 1901-03, quoted in Bush, J., *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*, p. 48.
[7] The Tariff Reform League was founded on 21 July, although *not* by Chamberlain. See Coetzee, pp.42-70.
[8] The Primrose League's slow decline is described by Diana Sheets in her unpublished PhD thesis, 'British Conservatism and the Primrose League: The Changing Character of Popular Politics, 1883-1901', pp.153-177, 315-324. She concludes that 'financial and minute records indicate a relative, rather than an absolute decline in the operations and income of the Primrose League'. (p.321).
[9] *Primrose League Gazette*, no. 40, March 1904, p.8.
[10] Ibid., no. 43, January 1907, p.9.
[11] Quoted in Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, p.172.
[12] The only organisation that had never practised this self-censorship was the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations. As has been mentioned before, their annual conference had voted in favour of women's suffrage on several occasions, and was to do so in 1907, 1908 and 1910. However, but these decisions did not have a very great influence on party policy.
[13] Journals of Lady Knightley, 6 November, 1908.
[14] Letter, copy dated July 1910, Lady Jane Strachey Papers, 7/JMS, the Women's Library.
[15] Ibid., notes for a speech, undated.
[16] Lady Strachey is listed as an Executive Committee member in the NUWSS Annual Report for 1907, and Emily Davies and Lady Knightley are shown as vice- presidents in the 1911 Annual Report. Fawcett Library. Constance Lytton joined the WSPU in 1909. A report of the 'Mud March' can be found in *The Times*, 11 February, 1907, p.11.
[17] The London Society for Women's Suffrage Annual Reports, 1908-1912. Box 338,

Fawcett Library. By 1909, these women were no longer listed as vice-presidents (apart from Louisa Twining), although the Countess of Selborne appeared as a vice-president in 1910. Emily Davies appeared on the Executive Committee until 1913, when it is likely that she resigned over the alliance of the NUWSS with the Labour Party.

[18] Stanger's Bill asked for women to be enfranchised on the same basis as men, that is, as householders. The number of Conservative MPs in the House of Commons was only 137 after the 1906 election defeat, and approximately half of them voted in the division, so the figures of 53.1% of Unionist votes for, and 46.9% against the Bill, are difficult to assess in terms of genuine party support. See Appendices.

[19] *Morning Post*, 29 February, 1908, p.6.

[20] For details see Rover, C., *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain*, p.221.

[21] *The Times*, 21 May 1908, p.12.

[22] *Women's Franchise*, 4 June 1908. Most suffrage organisations did not want adult suffrage, but the 'democratic suffragists' from the trade unions and co-operative movements who formed the People's Suffrage Federation in 1908 were in favour.

[23] Both processions are described in detail in Lisa Tickner's *The Spectacle of Women*, London, 1987, pp.80-100. The WSPU procession is described in Rosen, A., *Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union 1903-1914*, London, 1974, pp.102-6.

[24] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 5, November 1910, p.60; Journals of Lady Knightley, 6 November 1908.

[25] The total number of people present at the event was estimated by the organisers at well over a quarter of a million, see *The Times*, 22 June 1908, p.9. The report in *The Times* stated that it might have been treble that number.

[26] *Votes for Women*, 2 July 1908. The leading article by Mrs Pethick-Lawrence was dated 29 June.

[27] Copy of letter dated 25 January 1907, Lady Jane Strachey papers.

[28] Journals of Lady Knightley, 19 March 1908; 21 June 1908.

[29] *The Queen*, 29 August 1908, p.383.

[30] The Conservative suffragist Lord Robert Cecil was less sympathetic to the militants. He was responsible for introducing a Public Meetings Bill which penalised anyone who used disorderly conduct to disrupt public meetings. HC Debates, 4th series, vol. 198, 19 December 1908, col. 2336.

[31] Letter dated 13 September 1908, Lady Jane Strachey papers.

[32] Journals of Lady Knightley, 5 November 1908.

[33] *The Queen*, 29 August 1908, p.383.

[34] Letter from Lady Strachey to *The Times*, 22 January 1907, p.15.

[35] The Dickinson Bill was introduced on 8 March 1907 and failed when it was 'talked out'. W. H. Dickinson, a Liberal MP, asked for the vote to be given to women on the same basis as men, and specifically included qualified married women.

[36] Letter to Rosalind Nash, 26 August 1907, Emily Davies Papers, EDXXI/16, Girton College. The Men's League for Women's Suffrage (MLWS) had been formed on 2 March 1907 by Herbert Jacob, a London barrister, in order to campaign for the enfranchisement of women using constitutional methods. It had a politically mixed membership (although predominantly Liberal) which included lawyers, clergy, doctors and academics, as well as men from the world of commerce and finance. One president of the MLWS was the Earl of Lytton, the free-thinking Conservative and member of a strongly suffragist family. He was the brother of Lady Betty Balfour and Lady

Constance Lytton. Among other Conservative supporters were the MPs Lord Robert Cecil, Edward Goulding, J. S. Harmood-Banner and Sir John Rolleston (list in *Women's Franchise*, 25 March 1909, pp.486-487), all of whom were to become members of the Conciliation Committee (see following chapter). Further details of this and other similar men's groups can be found in John, A. V. and Eustance, C., eds., *The Men's Share? Masculinities, Male Support and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920.*

[37] Harriet Packer in the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 2, February 1910, p.11.

[38] Jarvis, D., 'British Conservatism and Class Politics in the 1920s', in *English Historical Review*, February 1996, p.64.

[39] Gilbert Samuel, brother of the Liberal MP Herbert Samuel, and husband of the Hon. Sec. of the CUWFA, Louise Gilbert Samuel, writing in the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 3, May 1910, p.30.

[40] Journals of Lady Knightley, 20 July 1908.

[41] *The Queen*, 29 August 1908, p.383.

[42] The anti-suffragists accused the Conservative suffragists of opportunism and 'political immorality', because the latter assumed that propertied women 'must necessarily be Conservatives and … their votes would be a valuable addition to the strength of the party'. The anti-suffragists went on to claim that this was bound to lead to adult suffrage being brought in by 'the Radicals'. *The Anti-Suffrage Review,* no. 15, February 1910, pp.1-2.

[43] An account of the foundation of the CUWFA can be found in the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 5, November 1910, p.60. Journals of Lady Knightley, 20 July 1908.

[44] Journals of Lady Knightley, 6 November 1908.

[45] *The Times*, 9 November 1908, p.16; *Morning Post*, 10 November 1908, p.9.

[46] Lady Lockyer (b.1853) had an unusual background for a member of the CUWFA. She had grown up in Bristol, in a Unitarian family with Liberal affiliations, and her father Samuel Woolcot Browne was a well-known philanthropist. Her sister was Annie Leigh Browne, the Liberal suffragist and founder and hon. secretary of the Women's Local Government Society. Lady Lockyer was a member of the latter, and became the secretary of the Sidmouth branch of the NUWSS.

[47] Journals of Lady Louisa Knightley, 5 November 1908.

[48] In *Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of 'First Wave' Feminism*, Brighton, 1986, Olive Banks has attempted to analyse the personal experiences and political beliefs which 'made' a sample of 116 women (and men) become what she calls 'first wave' feminists (as opposed to modern feminists). In her study Banks has used four 'cohorts', representing four generations of feminists, so that ideological and other changes over time could be identified. This generational model is a useful one to use to identify the age, background, and opportunities for political involvement of the Conservative women who formed and led the CUWFA. The first cohort consists of women born before 1828, and represents those who were working in the field before an organised women's movement. e.g. the Conservative pioneer of workhouse visiting and nursing, Louisa Twining, 1820-1911. The second cohort was born between 1828 and 1848, and consists of most of the leaders of 19th century women's rights campaigns for access to employment, education, as well as legal and political rights, e.g. Millicent Fawcett, 1847-1929, and the Conservatives Jessie Boucherett, 1825-1905, Emily Davies, 1830-1921, and Eleanor Sidgwick, 1845-1936. The third cohort were born between 1849 and 1871, and came into the women's movement towards the end of the century. This

group contains many of the leading figures of the organised suffrage movement, e.g. Emmeline Pankhurst, 1858-1928, and the Conservatives Maud, Countess of Selborne, 1858-1950, Lady Betty Balfour, 1867-1942, Lady Robert Cecil, 1868-1958, and Lady Constance Lytton, 1869-1923. The fourth cohort, born between 1872 and 1891, represents the last generation of 'first-wave' feminists who entered the suffrage campaign as young women, e.g. Christabel Pankhurst, 1880-1958, and the Conservative Lady Castlereagh, 1879-1959.

[49] Lady Frances Balfour came from a Liberal family, and despite her marriage she remained a Liberal throughout her life. In protest against Irish Home Rule she became a member of the Women's Liberal Unionist Association, but she left the organisation in 1904 because she did not support tariff reform. Frances Balfour's memoirs, *Ne Obliviscaris: Dinna forget*, London, 1930, are full of political interest. For further details about the 'Hotel Cecil', see J. P. Cornford's 'The Parliamentary Foundations of the Hotel Cecil' in *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain: Essays in honour of George Kitson Clark*, ed. Robert Robson, London, 1967, pp.268-311.

[50] Viscountess Midleton's husband was known as St John Brodrick before he succeeded to the title in 1907. He had been Secretary of State for India between 1903 and 1905. The Earl of Meath also became known as one of the 'die-hards'. These were the 112 peers (predominantly landed aristocracy) and two bishops who staged a revolt against the 1911 Parliament Bill, which abolished the House of Lords' veto over government bills. As well as the Earl of Meath, other 'die-hards' whose wives were to become prominent members of the CUWFA were the Earl of Fingall, Lord Rayleigh, the Earl of Selborne, and Lord Willoughby de Broke. See Phillips, G. D., *The Diehards: Aristocratic Society and Politics in Edwardian England*, Cambridge, Mass., 1979.

[51] Lady Knightley was to give up the presidency of the CUWFA in 1910 in order to devote herself to the BWEA.

[52] Women in New Zealand gained the vote in 1893, and in 1902 they were granted the vote for all federal elections in Australia.

[53] *The Times*, 9 November 1908, p.16.

[54] It has not been possible to find an existing copy of the first number of the *CUWFA Review*. It was probably published in November 1909, since the second and successive numbers appeared from February 1910 at quarterly intervals. From Lady Knightley's journals it is clear that these objectives were decided at meetings held during the first half of 1909, e.g. entry for 1 April 1909.

[55] *The Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no.2, February 1910, p.10. The only significant change to this statement was in 1912, when the words 'universal suffrage' was changed to 'manhood suffrage', probably in response to the proposed Liberal Reform Bill.

[56] Mrs Emma Boulnois quoted in *Women's Franchise*, 27 May, 1909, p.599.

[57] *The Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who*, 1913, p.35. Another instance was when some Liberal women had formed the Union of Practical Suffragists in 1896 to persuade the Women's Liberal Federation to agree to support pro-suffrage Liberal parliamentary candidates only.

[58] Draft of a speech from an undated folder, Lady Jane Strachey papers.

[59] *The Globe*, 20 November 1908, p.3. The report gave details of the debate and noted that 'the resolution was carried by a large majority'.

[60] Lord Derby, the Tory Prime Minister, used the phrase ' a leap in the dark' during the 1867 Reform Bill debate. Lady Lovat, 'Women and the Suffrage' in *The Nineteenth*

Century, no. 377, July 1908, p.73.
[61] *The Times*, 24 November 1908, p.4.
[62] Diary of Edith Milner, 19 August 1908. Diary in private possession.
[63] Journals of Lady Knightley, 5 December 1908.
[64] *Women's Franchise*, 25 March 1909, p.475; 15 July 1909, p.682.
[65] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, February 1910, no. 2, pp.19- 20.
[66] *Women's Franchise*, 25 March 1909, p.474; 12 August 1909, p.726.
[67] *The Times*, 9 December 1908, p.11.
[68] The bill also proposed the abolition of plural voting. Howard was the son of Rosalind, Countess of Carlisle, a radical Liberal, temperance reformer, and member of the NUWSS.
[69] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 2, February 1910, p.12.
[70] *Women's Franchise*, 14 January 1909, p.342; 12 August 1909, p.726; 17 June 1909, p.634.
[71] Ibid., 29 April 1909, pp.538-539.
[72] Ibid., p.546. The report quotes the name of the representative from the CUWFA as Maria Chadwick, but this was probably a journalistic error.
[73] Executive Committee of the Ladies' Grand Council of the Primrose League, 2 July 1897. The Primrose League was asked to send a delegate to the International Council of Women to be held in London in two years time. They refused on the grounds that 'they were only a Body of Women working under the Grand Council'.
[74] *Women's Franchise*, 28 January 1909, pp.366-367.
[75] Ibid., 4 March 1909, p.432; *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 10, January-March 1912, p.184. Biographical details of Lilias Ashworth Hallett (1844-1922) can be found in Elizabeth Crawford's *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*, London, 1999, pp.259-262, 390-391.
[76] Martin Pugh has talked about the Conservatism of these areas in the north-west being due firstly to the 'the immediate relevance of the Irish question', particularly because of the strength of Orangeism on Merseyside, and secondly to 'the traditional populist character of local Conservatism', *The Tories and the People*, pp.122-125. Two strongly pro-suffrage Unionist MPs in Liverpool were John Harmood-Banner (Liverpool, Everton) and Charles MacArthur (Liverpool, Kirkdale). Both men joined the Conciliation Committee for Woman Suffrage in 1910. The Theilmann family is listed in Bulmer' s *Gazeteer of Trades and Professions in Hull*, 1892.
[77] These figures are taken from branch reports submitted to the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review* from no. 2 in February 1910 to no. 20 in July – September 1914. See Appendices.
[78] The WFL was formed because the WSPU had moved away from its socialist origins and was becoming increasingly undemocratic. Led by Charlotte Despard, they claimed to be militant but non-violent, and used tax resistance and a boycott of the census in 1911 in their campaign for the vote. See Frances, H., ' "Dare to be Free!": The Women's Franchise League and Its Legacy', in *Votes for Women*, eds. Purvis, J. and Holton, S. S., pp.181-202.
[79] The figures are taken from the A. J. R. (ed.), *The Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who*, London, 1913. *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, April-June 1913, pp.292-296.
[80] Masson, U., ' "Political Conditions in Wales Are Quite Different … " party politics and votes for women in Wales, 1912-15', in *Women's History Review*, vol. 9, no. 2,

2000, pp.369-388.
[81] Many of the details about Conservative landownership and local influence have been obtained from Pugh, M., *The Tories and the People*, pp.94-138. A more general picure of aristocratic influence is provided by Cannadine, D., *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy.*
[82] Leneman, L., *A Guid Cause*, pp.215-216, 265.
[83] Information about Jessie Montgomery can be found in 'The Late Miss Montgomery', reprinted from the *University Extension Bulletin*, London, January 1919.
[84] Deneke, Helena, *Grace Hadow*, London, 1946. Also Jenkins, Inez, *The History of the Women's Institute Movement of England and Wales*, Oxford, 1953, pp.20, 24, 30, 39, 41-42, 65, 75.
[85] Information about Lady Trustram Eve can be found in Glick, D., *The National Council of Women of Great Britain*, pp.32, 166, 250.
[86] *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 2, February 1910, p.19.
[87] Ibid., no. 2, February 1910, p.13.
[88] *Common Cause*, vol. I, 1910, p.573.
[89] *The Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 2, February 1910 p.18.

Chapter Five
[1] *The Englishwoman* was a new periodical which began publication in February 1909. It was intended for a mixed audience ('we hold that as the world is made up of men and women, and they work together in real life … much has been lost by dissociating them violently in the conduct of life', no.1, p.1.), and supported the cause of constitutional suffrage by means of intellectual and rational argument. It operated under the joint editorship of Lady Strachey, Lady Frances Balfour, the suffragist author and actress Cicely Hamilton, the suffragist artist Mary Lowndes and Elisina Grant Richards. *The Englishwoman* was an independent non-party periodical, and among the Conservatives who wrote for it were Lord Robert Cecil and the Earl of Selborne.
[2] The first editor of the *Review* was Harriet Packer. Eveline Mitford took over as editor in October 1911 after Packer resigned. Olga Hartley joined Mitford as editorial assistant.
[3] C*onservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 9, October 1911, pp.148-149; no. 16, July-September 1913, p.304; no. 8, July 1911, p.132. Margery Corbett Ashby was a committed Liberal and on the executive committee of the NUWSS. Eva Gore-Booth was a radical suffragist and active in the northern labour movement.
[4] Ibid., no. 13, October-December 1912, p.235; no. 12, July-September 1912, p.213.
[5] Ibid., no. 3, May 1910, p.30-31. Gilbert Samuel's article 'Women's Franchise: A Safeguard against Socialism', lists the various threats to the family posed by socialism, e.g. the abolition of marriage and the communal raising of children.
[6] Ibid., no. 5, November 1910, p.65.
[7] A discussion of citizenship in the context of parliamentary reform and the campaign for women's suffrage can be found in Rendall, J., 'The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867', pp.119-178.
[8] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 6, January 1911, p.94.
[9] Ibid., no. 2, February 1910, p.14; no. 8, July 1911, pp.128-129; no. 14, January-March 1913, pp.259-260.
[10] Ibid., no. 14, January-March 1913, pp.259-260.
[11] Ibid., no. 6, January 1911, p.82.
[12] Ibid., p.84.

[13] Ibid. pp.84-5.
[14] Ibid., p.94.
[15] These included Sophia Jex Blake, Lady Knightley, Eleanor Sidgwick and Lady Strachey. The latter claimed that she had heard Mill speak in the House of Commons in her speech given to the Lyceum Club, 28 January 1907. Lady Jane Strachey papers 7/JMS.
[16] HC Debates, 3rd series, vol. 187, 20 May 1867, cols. 817-845.
[17] Pugh, M., *The March of the Women*, p.106.
[18] Western Australia followed in 1899, New South Wales in 1902, Tasmania in 1903, Queensland in 1905 and Victoria in 1908. The federal vote was granted to women in 1902, but aborigines from Queensland and Western Australia were excluded from voting until 1962. In Canada and the USA the vote was gained province by province, state by state, but the federal vote was gained by the women in the former in 1918, and the latter in 1920. In Europe the first country to enfranchise women for national elections was Finland in 1906.
[19] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 3, May 1910, p.32. More information about Cockburn can be found in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8, 1891-1939, Melbourne, 1981.
[20] Ibid., no. 2, February 1910, p.16; no. 3, May 1910, p.32. Dreadnoughts were the new battleships being built to challenge Germany's growing naval power.
[21] Articles that contained similar arguments to those of Cockburn and Stout can be found in no. 14, January-March 1913, p.263; no. 16, July-September 1913, p.308. Two articles that took the view that women's commitment to the Empire was a strong argument for female enfranchisement were 'The Imperial Aspect of Women's Suffrage' by Marion Chadwick, no. 7, April 1911, p.106, and 'Women's Influence in Imperial Politics' by Mrs Scoresby Routledge, no. 9, October 1911, p.151.
[22] The League of the Empire was founded at around the same time as the Victoria League in 1901, and was concerned with the promotion of imperial education for schoolchildren. Julia Bush devotes a chapter to women's contribution to imperial education in her book that deals with the whole question of women and imperialism, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*, pp.126-145. Antoinette Burton's *Burdens of History* deals with the attitude of the women's movement towards the Empire, and has a chapter on British Imperial Suffrage, pp.171- 205. The South African War had been very expensive in terms of lives and money, and Britain had suffered a number of humiliating defeats in the early stages of the conflict. Boyd, C. W., ed., *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, London, 1914, II, pp.68-73, 328-335, 369-372. Milner, Lord Alfred, *The Nation and the Empire*, London, 1913, pp.90-91.
[23] Boyd, C. W., ed., *Mr Chamberlain's Speeches*, p.368.
[24] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 16, July-September 1913, p.306.
[25] Ibid., no. 9, October 1911, p.151.
[26] *Women's Franchise*, 20 February 1908, p.386. Mrs Ware wrote this *before* the establishment of the CUWFA, but it is a revealing remark.
[27] For example, *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, 'The Position of Medical Women in India' by Mrs. Slater, no. 12, July-September 1912, p.218; 'The Position of Medical Woman in India' by May Thorne, M.D., no. 18, January- March 1914, p.352; 'The Awakening of Indian Women', unsigned, no. 4, August 1910, p.48.
[28] Ibid., no. 12, July-September 1912, p.218; no. 7, April 1911, p.109.
[29] Burton, A., 'The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and "The Indian

Woman," 1865-1915', in Chaudhuri, N. and Strobel, M., eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, Bloomington, 1992, pp.151-152.

[30] Antoinette Burton devotes considerable space to suffrage periodicals (although *not* the *Review*) in her chapter on British women's suffrage and imperialism in *Burdens of History*, pp.171-205.

[31] The figures were based on a house-to-house enquiry conducted by the ILP in 1905. This showed that 'of the female voters on the municipal roll in fifty selected districts in England 82 per cent are working-class women'. Fuller details of this and other surveys can be found in the explanatory memorandum to the text of the 1911 Conciliation Bill published by the Conciliation Committee for Woman Suffrage, Victor, 2nd Earl of Lytton papers, Knebworth House. *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 13, October-December 1912, p.237.

[32] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 5, November 1910, p.74.

[33] Ibid., no. 6, January 1911, p.82

[34] Ibid., no. 10, January-March 1912, p.174.

[35] Ibid., no. 3, May 1910, p.30.

[36] *Primrose League Gazette*, 2 July 1900, p.9.

[37] Two of the organisations that adopted a policy which advocated protective legislation for working women were the Women's Trade Union League, founded in 1874, and the Women's Labour League, which was founded as a women's section of the Labour Party in 1906.

[38] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 9, October 1911, pp.161-162.

[39] Ibid., no. 2, February 1910, p.14.

[40] Ibid., no. 4, August 1910, pp.46-47. In 1910 the MOH for Birmingham, Dr John Robertson, found that there was *less* infant mortality among working women, because they had more money for food. Graham also strongly disagreed with the argument that the law preventing women returning to work after childbirth within one month should be extended to at least three months. The allegation that the children of working women suffered as a result of their mother's employment was a matter of dispute among doctors and social workers during this period, and had arisen out of the 1906 Conference on Infant Mortality. See Dyhouse, C., *Feminism and the Family in England 1880-1939*, Oxford, 1989, pp.85-86.

[41] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 8, July 1911, p.132.

[42] Ibid., no.10, January-March 1912, p.173.

[43] Walker, L., The Women's Movement in England in the late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', unpublished PhD thesis, pp. 159-184.

[44] Webb, B., 'Women and the Factory Acts', Fabian Tract No. 67, February 1896, reproduced in Alexander, S., ed., *Women's Fabian Tracts*, London, 1988, pp.17- 32.

[45] Journals of Lady Knightley, 17 January 1908.

[46] *Conservative & Unionist Woman's Franchise Review*, no. 3, May 1910, p.30. The feminist historian Sally Alexander has pointed out that protectionists like Beatrice Webb and anti-protectionists like Lady Knightley were concentrating on economic solutions to the problem of women's working conditions, rather than identifying and addressing the problem of the sexual division of labour that underpinned these inequalities. See her introduction to *Women's Fabian Tracts*, pp.1-13. Alexander has examined the idea of the sexual division of labour in *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History*, London, 1994, pp.3-55. However, it is important to remember that there

was a general consensus that the primary role of woman was that of wife and mother, and this view underpinned most thinking about women's position in society. The differing views on protective legislation held by women of different classes and allegiances is discussed in Levine, P., *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment*, pp.157-175. Also Linda Walker, 'The Women's Movement in England in the late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', unpublished PhD thesis, pp.159-184.
[47] Banks, O., *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement*, pp.163-179. 'Welfare feminism' is used to describe the campaign for protective legislation designed to improve the health and welfare of mothers and children which was conducted by organisations like the Women's Co-operative Guild and the Women's Labour League.
[48] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 3, May 1910, p.28.
[49] *The Morning Post*, 1 December 1888, p.2.
[50] Green, E. H. H., *The Crisis of Conservatism*, pp.6, 152-3, 296.
[51] The relationship between Lord and Lady Salisbury is described in Steele, D., *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography*, London, 1999, pp.20-22. Also Roberts. A., *Salisbury: Victorian Titan*, pp.30-6, 105-111; Cecil, R., *The Cecils of Hatfield House*, London, 1975, paperback ed., pp.225-8, 249-261.
[52] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 5, November 1910, p.65.
[53] Ibid., no. 7, April 1911, p.105.
[54] Ibid., no. 8, July 1911, p.129.
[55] Ibid., no. 13, October-December 1912, p.237.
[56] Ibid., no. 10, January-March 1912, p.173.
[57] John, A. V. and Eustance, C., 'Shared Histories – Differing Identities', in John, A. V. and Eustance, C., eds., *The Men's Share?: Masculinities, Male Support and Women's Suffrage in Britain*, p.29.
[58] Pugh, M., *March of the Women*, p.40. Brian Harrison has noted that the statements by politicians about the differences between the sexes, and the effect those differences would have if women were enfranchised, were usually counched in unscientific and confused terms which used sweeping generalisations. *Separate Spheres*, p.78.
[59] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 3, May 1910, p.28.
[60] The references in the Old Testament to Eve can be found in Genesis 2 20-23, 3. *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version, London, Collins, 1952. Also there is a useful section on early Christian beliefs about women in Anderson, B. and Zinsser, J., *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, vol.1, Harmondsworth, 1989, pp.77-84.
[61] Suffragist and anti-suffragist imagery is discussed in Tickner, L., *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14*, London, 1987, pp.30-42, and chapter 4. Interestingly, Tickner mentions that the image of Ceres, the Roman equivalent of Demeter, was adopted as a socialist representation of woman, p.32.
[62] Wollstonecraft, M., *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), reprinted 1975, p.109, p.263.
[63] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 10, January-March 1912, pp.172-173.
[64] Ibid, no. 8, July 1911, p.128.
[65] Ibid., no. 12, July-September 1912, pp.215-216.
[66] Ibid., no. 12, July-September 1912, p.213.
[67] *Primrose League Gazette*, 1 April 1896, p.6-7.

Chapter Six

[1] Brailsford to Fawcett, 18 January and 25 January 1910, Millicent Garrett Fawcett Papers, Manchester Public Library, M/50/2/1/291, 292.

[2] Brailsford's wife, Jane, a committed suffragist, had joined the WSPU in July 1909. In October 1909 she was arrested and sentenced to one month's imprisonment for refusing to be bound over to keep the peace. A fellow prisoner was Lady Constance Lytton, sister of the Conservative politician and suffragist, Victor, Earl of Lytton.

[3] Of the 670 newly-elected members of the House of Commons 275 were Liberals, 273 were Conservative and Unionists, 40 were Labour, and 82 were Irish Nationalists. *Longman Handbook of Modern British History*, eds. Cook, C., & Stevenson, J., 2nd edition, London, 1988, p.75. The Labour Party conferences of 1909 and 1910 passed resolutions which stipulated that adults of both sexes should be enfranchised. The question of Labour Party support for women's suffrage is dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

[4] Letter from Brailsford, 14 February 1910, 42014, Victor, 2nd Earl of Lytton Papers, Knebworth.

[5] The August 1910 edition of *The Englishwoman* (no.19, p.5) names and lists the Committee as consisting of 18 Liberal, 14 Conservative, 5 Irish Nationalist, and 6 Labour representatives. Lord Lytton claimed there were 60 members by November in a letter to Asquith on 15 November 1910, reprinted in *The Englishwoman*, no. 23, December 1910, pp.121-124. However, there is no list of members attached.

[6] Ibid., no. 19, p.5. The *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review,* August 1910, p.47, gives a list but leaves out Craig. The death of MacArthur is not noted in either journal.

[7] The details that follow include the parliamentary seat held at the time of the founding of the Conciliation Committee only. G. A. Arbuthnot, Burnley 1910; Sir William Bull, Hammersmith 1900-29; James Craig, East Down 1906-18; H. S. Foster, Lowestoft 1910; Edward Goulding, Worcester 1908-22; John Harmood- Banner, Liverpool, Everton 1905-24; Frederick Leverton Harris, Stepney 1907- 10; John Henniker Heaton, Canterbury 1885-1910; Charles MacArthur, Kirkdale 1907-10; William Ormsby-Gore, Denbigh 1910-18; Basil Peto, Devizes 1910-18; Sir John Randles, N. W. Manchester 1906-10; James Remnant, Holborn 1900-28; and Sir John Rolleston, Hertford 1910-16. Further details can be found in *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, vols. 1-3, Hassocks, 1976, 1978 & 1979. More information about Henniker Heaton, Leverton Harris, MacArthur and Ormsby-Gore can be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Supplements 1901-1990, 1901-1996, London, 15 vols.

[8] This phrase comes from the *Conservative Agents' Journal*, October 1910, p.105.

[9] Despite the generosity of men like Bull the ASU was always short of funds since there were few local branches and as a result the journal *Liberty* ceased publication in February 1912.

[10] Details of the founding of the Anti-Socialist Union can be found in K. D. Brown's *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, London, 1974, pp. 234-261. Further information can be found in F. Coetzee's *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England*, pp.91-106.

[11] Arbuthnot debated with Hyndman, the founder of the Social Democratic Federation, on the subject *Will Socialism Benefit the English People: Debate between H. M. Hyndman and Gerald Arbuthnot, 9 February 1909*, London Municipal Society, 1909, pp.8-9.

[12] *Anti-Socialist*, no. 9, October 1909, p.105.
[13] *Morning Post*, 24 June 1910, p.9, gave a full report of what they called 'the Inauguration of the Women's Branch' of the ASU. The details of the activities of women members were reported by Sir William Bull. Interestingly, the *Anti- Socialist* of January 1910 noted that the 'Ladies' Committee' of the ASU had met, under the auspices of the Primrose League, as early as 2 December 1909, and drawing-room meetings held by 'the Women's Branch' during the next three months were also reported.
[14] *Liberty*, March 1911, vol. 3, no.3, p.60; 12 April 1911, vol. 3, no. 4, p.88; 21 June 1911, vol. 3, no. 14, p.178.
[15] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 3, May 1910, p.30.
[16] E. H. H. Green has discussed this development of social policy more fully in *The Crisis of Conservatism*, pp.242-263.
[17] The background to this increasing emphasis on social policy has been looked at in more detail by José Harris in 'The Transition to High Politics in English Social Policy, 1880-1914', pp.58-79.
[18] Lawrence, Jon, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism 1880-1914, 649.
[19] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no.3, May 1910, p.30.
[20] Green, E. H. H., *The Crisis of Conservatism*, p.329.
[21] Ibid., p.287.
[22] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 3, May 1910, pp.26-27.
[23] Ibid., no. 2, February 1910, p.10.
[24] Ibid., no. 2, February 1910, p.19, no. 3, May 1910, pp.34-35, no. 4, August 1910, pp.50-51; no. 4, August 1910, p.42.
[25] Ibid., no. 4, August 1910, p.43.
[26] Ibid., no. 3, May 1910, p.35.
[27] Ibid., no. 3, May 1910, p.35.
[28] Ibid., no. 3, May 1910, p.34; no. 3, May 1910, p.35; no. 4, August 1910, p.50.
[29] *The Englishwoman*, no. 18, July 1910, p.256.
[30] Letter from Eleanor (Lady Robert) Cecil to Maud Selborne, 26 October 1910, MS Eng. Lett. D.424, f.15.
[31] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 2, February 1910, p.11.
[32] Ibid., no. 3, May 1910, p.25.
[33] Draft of a letter by Emily Davies to the Editor of the *Morning Post*, 11 July 1910, EDXXI/23a, Emily Davies Papers.
[34] *The Times*, 11 July 1910, p.11.
[35] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 17, 14 June 1910, cols.1202-1207.
[36] *Morning Post*, 15 June, 1910, p.7; 22 June 1910, p.7.
[37] Notes for a speech, undated but probably June 1910. Lady Jane Strachey papers, 7/JMS.
[38] The cabinet meeting was reported in the journal of J. A. Pease, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. See *A Liberal Chronicle: Journals and Papers of J. A. Pease, Ist Lord Gainford, 1908-1910*, eds. C Hazlehurst and C. Woodland, London, The Historians' Press, 1994 pp.187-188.
[39] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 18, 23 June 1910, col. 488.
[40] The WSPU's procession on 18 June attracted 10,000 women and was the object of considerable admiration in the *Conservative & Women's Franchise Review*, which also reported the NUWSS demonstration. No. 4, August 1910, p.55.

[41] *The Times*, 4 July 1910, p.12.
[42] HC Debates, 5th series, vol.19, 11 July 1910, cols. 48-51; 125-133.
[43] Ibid., cols. 91-94; 100-107; 254-266.
[44] Balfour Add. 49793. Letter to C. Pankhurst, 23 October 1907, Balfour Papers, pp.19-24; HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 19, 12 July 1910, col. 266.
[45] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 19, 11-12 July 1910, cols. 41-324.
[46] Ibid., cols. 263-264.
[47] *The Times*, 11 July 1910, p.11.
[48] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 6, January 1911, p.82.
[49] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 19, 12 July 1910, col. 314-316.
[50] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review,* no. 5, November 1910, p.59.
[51] *The Times*, 1 December 1888, p.8.
[52] Voting figures are taken from HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 19, 12 July 1910, cols. 323-328. An organised system of pairing for the Bill was arranged, and this revealed that out of 48 MPs who paired, 11 Unionists were for the Bill, 16 were against it, while 13 Liberal and Labour MPs were for, and 8 were against. This means that 43.2% of those Unionists who voted or paired were in favour of women's suffrage in principle, and 56.8% were against – virtually the same result as the figures without the Unionist pairs included.
[53] W. C. Bridgeman to Lord Lytton, 21 July 1910, 42102, Victor, 2nd Earl of Lytton Papers.
[54] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 19, 12 July 1910, cols. 329-334.
[55] *The Times*, 14 July, 1910, p.5.
[56] *The Standard*, 13 July, 1910, p.8.
[57] Fawcett Library Autograph Letter Collection, vol. 1, hii, Lady Frances Balfour to Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 14 July, 1910.
[58] Lytton to Asquith, 19 July 1910, unnumbered letter, Victor, 2nd Earl of Lytton Papers.
[59] Ibid., Asquith to Lytton, 23 July 1910, 41981.
[60] Asquith had indicated as much in his statement of 23 June 1910. See HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 18, 23 June 1910, col. 488.
[61] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 19, 28 July 1910 1910, cols. 2338-9. The following day the Cabinet agreed that no promises would be given about the future of the Bill and J. A. Pease recorded in his journal that he had advised his colleagues that 'with the constitutional point unsolved & the Irish having the Govmt's life in their power, we could give no further promise as to facilities next year'. See Hazlehurst, C. and Woodland, C., eds., *A Liberal Chronicle: Journals and Papers of J. A. Pease, Ist Lord Gainford, 1908-1910*, p.198.
[62] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 19, 29 July 1910, cols. 2598-2601.
[63] Lord Hugh Cecil to Maud, Countess of Selborne, 26 October 1910, MS Eng. Lett. D.429, Selborne Papers.
[64] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 19, 11 July 1910, col. 100.
[65] *The Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 4, August 1910, p.41.
[66] *The Common Cause*, 4 August 1910, vol. II, no. 69, p.278.
[67] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 4, August 1910, p.45.
[68] Ibid., no. 5, November 1910, p.60.
[69] Ibid., p.75. Lady Betty Balfour, 'An Analysis of the Debate in the House of Commons on the Woman's Franchise Bill', CUWFA pamphlet, 1910.
[70] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 6, January 1911, pp.95- 97. The NUWSS had well over 200 societies by this time. NUWSS Annual Report, 1910, the Women's Library, pp.44-45.

[71] Ibid., no. 5, November 1910, pp.76-77; no. 6, January 1911, pp.95-97.
[72] Ibid., no. 5, November 1910, p.60; no. 6, January 1911, p.80.
[73] There is a fuller description of this event in Andrew Rosen's *Rise Up Women!,* pp.138-142.
[74] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 20, 18 November, 1910, cols. 135-138.
[75] Ibid., 22 November 1910, cols. 272-273. At a meeting of the Cabinet on the same day it was agreed that there would be no time for the Bill in the next parliamentary session because of the pressure of business,e.g. the Parliament Bill, the National Insurance Bill, the proposal to pay MPs etc. See Hazlehurst, C. and Woodland, C., eds., *A Liberal Chronicle: Journals and Papers of J. A. Pease, Ist Lord Gainford, 1908-1910*, p.219.
[76] See Rosen, A., *Rise Up Women!*, p.143.
[77] *The Times* made this point on 24 November, 1910, p.10.
[78] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 6, January 1911, p.79.
[79] Lytton to Margesson, 28 November 1910, 42100, Victor, 2nd Earl of Lytton Papers.
[80] Eleanor (Lady Robert) Cecil to Maud Selborne, Selborne Papers, MS Eng. Lett. D.429. f.17, 14 November 1910.
[81] *The Englishwoman*, no. 23, December 1910, p.122.
[82] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 6, January 1911, p.79.

Chapter Seven

[1] One million fewer votes were cast in this election. The Liberals and Unionists now had 272 seats each, while Labour had 42 seats and the Irish Nationalists had 84, the last two parties having gained 2 seats each. See Cook, C. & Stevenson, J.,eds., *Longman Handbook of Modern British History*, p.75.
[2] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 6, January 1911, p.80.
[3] *The Anti-Suffrage Review*, January 1911, p.3.
[4] The title of the Bill was altered from 'A Bill to Extend the Parliamentary Franchise to Women Occupiers' to 'A Bill to confer the Parliamentary Franchise on Women'.
[5] Explanatory memorandum to the text of the 1911 Conciliation Bill published by the Conciliation Committee for Woman Suffrage, 42060, Victor, 2nd Earl of Lytton papers.
[6] Ibid. The Unionist members of the Conciliation Committee at the beginning of 1911 are listed at the beginning of the memorandum.
[7] Hugh Thom Barrie, N. Londonderry 1906-1918; Charles Goldman, Penryn & Falmouth 1910-1918; Edward Marshall Hall, E. Toxteth division of Liverpool 1910-1916; Harry Hope, Buteshire 1910-1918; Viscount Lewisham, West Bromwich 1910-1918; George Touche, N. Islington 1910-1918. Further information about these MPs and the ones below can be found in *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, vols. 1-3. Additional details about some of them can be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Supplements 1901-1990, 1901-1996. The parliamentary seat described is the one held during the existence of the Conciliation Committee.
[8] James Agg-Gardner, Cheltenham 1911-1928; Col. Charles Burn, Torquay 1910-1923; Lord Robert Cecil, Hitchin 1911-23; Arthur Fell, Great Yarmouth 1906-1922; Samuel Roberts, Ecclesall 1902-1913; William Mitchell-Thomson, North Down 1910-1918; Viscount Wolmer, Newton 1910-1918.
[9] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 7, April 1911, p.102.
[10] Ibid., p.117. Agg-Gardner gained his seat at Cheltenham in 28 April 1911 as the result of the previous election being declared void, and a by-election being held. See Agg-Gardner, Sir J., *Some Parliamentary Recollections*, London, 1927, pp.67-70.

[11] Ibid., p.118. More information about the relationship between CUWFA and the other suffrage societies in Liverpool can be found in Cowman, K., ' "Crossing the Great Divide": Inter-organizational Suffrage Relationships on Merseyside, 1895- 1914', pp.37-52.
[12] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 8, July 1911, p.140.
[13] Ibid., p.141.
[14] Ibid., no 7, April 1911, p.110. The Town Councils listed were Arbroath, Bangor, Barnsley, Bradford, Brechin, Broughty Ferry, Cardiff, Cork, Cumnock, Devonport, Dover, Dublin, Dundee, Fraserburgh,Glasgow, Haddington, Hamilton, Hawick, Huddersfield, Hull, Inverurie, Kilmarnock, Kilwinning, Kirkwall, Leicester, Lerwick, Limerick, Liverpool, Manchester, North Berwick, Nottingham, Penryn, Perth, Preston, Saltcoats, Southport, Stoke Newington, Thurso, West Bromwich.
[15] Dublin, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Hull, and Liverpool had large CUWFA branches, and Liverpool, Penryn and West Bromwich had the Unionist MPs John Harmood Banner, E. Marshall Hall, Charles Goldman, and Lord Lewisham on the Conciliation Committee.
[16] See Hollis, P., *Ladies Elect*, pp.411-418.
[17] The Hon. Secretary of the Liverpool branch of the CUWFA made this point in her report. See *The Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 7, April 1911, p.118.
[18] Ibid., no. 7, April 1911, p.119; no. 8, July 1911, p.142.
[19] Ibid., no. 8, July 1911, pp.140-141.
[20] Ibid., no. 7, April 1911, p.102.
[21] Ibid., pp.104-105. *The National Review*, vol. 57, March 1911- August 1911, 251- 257.
[22] Balfour had made a speech at the Albert Hall on 29 November 1910 offering to agree to a referendum on tariff reform if the Liberals submitted to one on Home Rule. *The Times*, 30 November 1910, p.9.
[23] *The Anti-Suffrage Review*, January 1912, pp.7-8.
[24] Weston, C. C., *The House of Lords and Ideological Politics: Lord Salisbury's Referendal Theory and the Conservative Party, 1846-1922*, Philadelphia, 1995, pp.1-11, 137-146, 156-183. Lord Selborne's correspondence on the issue during this period can be found in Boyce, D. G., ed., *The Crisis of British Unionism: The Domestic Political Papers of the Second Earl of Selborne, 1885-1922*, pp.44-46, 49, 51-56, 63. Selborne himself wrote on the subject in *The State and the Citizen*, London, 1913. The theoreticians of the referendum were the Liberal Unionist A. V. Dicey and the Liberal J. A. Hobson. Their ideas are discussed in Meadowcroft, J. and Taylor, M. W., 'Liberalism and the Referendum in British Political Thought 1890-1914', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1990, 35-57. See also Bogdanor, V., *The People and the Party System: The Referendum and Electoral Reform in British Politics*, Cambridge, 1981, pp.11-33.
[25] Cecil, H., *Conservatism*, London, 1912, pp.238-239.
[26] Asquith in H. C. Debates, 5th series, vol. 19, 12 July 1910, col. 251. In the same debate on the Conciliation Bill Balfour warned that 'I should find my whole attitude on this question altered if I thought the majority of women were against the extension of the franchise', col. 257.
[27] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 25, 5 May 1911, col. 805.
[28] Arthur Lyttelton to Millicent Fawcett, 1 May 1910, Fawcett Papers, Manchester Public Library, M50/2/1/338.
[29] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 25, 5 May 1911, cols. 788-789.

[30] For example, at the annual conference of the LRC held in January 1905, a resolution was passed which which approved of adult suffrage 'and the complete enfranchisement of both sexes'. Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the LRC, 26-28 January 1905, reprinted London 1967, pp.235-237.
[31] Snowden, P., *An Autobiography*, vol. I, London, 1934, pp.278-299.This question would be argued again at the party conference in 1913, when, after a lively debate, it was agreed that the Parliamentary Labour Party would 'oppose any Franchise Bill in which women are not included'. Other prominent Labour MPs like Keir Hardie, George Lansbury and Philip Snowden were all members of the Conciliation Committee and voted in favour of the 1910 and 1911 Conciliation Bills.
[32] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 25, 5 May 1911, col. 790.
[33] Voting figures are taken from HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 25, 5 May 1911, cols. 805-810, and Harrison, B., *Separate Spheres*, pp.28-29.
[34] List of MPs in Millicent Garrett Fawcett Papers, Manchester Public Library, M/50/2/14/2.
[35] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 25, 5 May 1911, col. 809.
[36] Martin Pugh has agreed with this assessment. See Pugh, M., *Electoral Reform in War and Peace 1906-1918*, p.36.
[37] *The Globe*, 6 May, 191I, p.8.
[38] *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 May 1911, p.7.
[39] *The Times*, 9 May 1911, p.12.
[40] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 25, 29 May 1911, col. 703-705.
[41] *The Times*, 17 June 1911, p.12.
[42] *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 8, July 1911, p.123.
[43] *The Times*, 19 June 1911, pp.33-34. The event was called 'The Women's Coronation Procession' because it coincided with the coronation of King George V. A description of the procession can be found in Tickner, L., *The Spectacle of Women*, pp.122-130.
[44] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 8, July 1911, p.124. Also a further report on p.127.
[45] The work of the Suffrage Atelier is described in Tickner, L., *The Spectacle of Women*, pp.20-26 Also in Hannam, J., Auchterlonie, M., and Holden, J., *International Encyclopedia of Women's Suffrage*, Santa Barbara and Oxford, 2000, pp.285-86.
[46] *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 8, July 1911, pp.141- 142.
[47] Journals of Lady Knightley, 17 June 1911.
[48] *The Times*, 19 June 1911, p.33.
[49] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 9, October 1911, pp.145- 146.
[50] David Lloyd George to the Master of Elibank, 5 September 1911, quoted in Morgan, D, *Suffragists and Liberals*, p.82.
[51] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 9, October 1911, p.164; no. 10, January-March 1912, p.186.
[52] Ibid., no. 9, October 1911, pp.162-163.
[53] *The Times*, 8 November 1911, p.8.
[54] Lord Lytton in the *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 10, January-March 1912, p.171.
[55] Maud, Countess of Selborne to the Earl of Selborne, 17 November 1911, Selborne Papers, MS. Eng.Lett. D.429. ff. 146-149.
[56] This view of Lloyd George was borne out when he delivered a speech in Bath on 24 November in which he claimed to have 'torpedoed' the Conciliation Bill. See *The*

Times, 25 November 1911, p.11.
[57] See Rosen, A., *Rise Up Women!*, pp.151-155. Also *The Times*, 22 November, 1911, p.8.
[58] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 10, January-March 1912, p.168.
[59] *Common Cause*, 30 November 1911, p.590; *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 10, January-March 1912, p.171.
[60] Balfour had resigned on 8 November 1911 not long after the humiliation of the passing of the Parliament Act. His leadership had been the subject of criticism for some time and was the cause of continuing disunity in the party. See Ramsden, J., *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-40*, pp.28-42.
[61] Andrew Bonar Law to Lady Betty Balfour, 11 November 1911, Bonar Law Papers, quoted in Hume, L. P., *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies*, p.125.
[62] Lord Robert Cecil to Miss H. Theilmann, 2 January 1912, Cecil Papers 51160.
[63] *The Times*, 18 November 1911, p.9.
[64] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 10, January-March 1912, p.168.
[65] The 'Norwegian' amendment was named after the provisions of a Women's Suffrage Bill which was under consideration in Norway. Women in Norway obtained the vote in 1913. See Hannam, J., Auchterlonie, M., and Holden, J., *International Encyclopedia of Women's Suffrage*, pp.217-218.
[66] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Re*view, no. 10, January-March 1912, p.171.
[67] Lord Robert Cecil to Miss H. Theilmann, 2 January 1912, Cecil Papers 51160.
[68] *Common Cause*, 30 November 1911, p.590; Maud, Countess of Selborne to Millicent Fawcett, March 1912 (no exact date), Millicent Garrett Fawcett Papers, M50/2/1/355.
[69] *The Times*, 6 December 1911, p.10.
[70] The divisions in Asquith's cabinet over the Reform Bill are outlined in Morgan, D., *Suffragists and Liberals*, pp.87-95.
[71] *The Times*, 2 March, 1912, p.8; 4 March 1912, pp.4 and 8; 5 March 1912, p.8., 6 March 1912, p.8.
[72] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 11, April-June, p.191.
[73] Journals of Lady Knightley, 7 March 1912.
[74] *The Standard*, 27 March 1912, p.11.
[75] *The Times*, 28 March 1912, p.7.
[76] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 36, 28 March 1912, col. 616.
[77] Ibid., col. 656.
[78] Ibid., cols. 659-660.
[79] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 11, April-June 1912, p.190.
[80] Voting figures are taken from HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 36, 28 March 1912, cols. 727-732, and Harrison, B., *Separate Spheres*, pp.28-29.
[81] *The Globe*, 29 March 1912, p.4.
[82] Ramsden, J., ed., *Real Old Tory Politics: The Political Diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-35*, p.45.
[83] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 11, April-June 1912, p.190.
[84] Ibid., no. 12, July-September 1912, p.212.
[85] Leventhal, F., *The Last Dissenter*, Oxford, 1985, p.90.

[86] Ramsden, J., ed., *Real Old Tory Politics: The Political Diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-35*, p.3.
[87] Pugh, M., *March of the Women*, p.32; Harrison, B., 'Women's Suffrage at Westminster, 1866-1928, p.99.
[88] Hume, L. P., *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies*, p.147. Hume describes the setting up of the EFF in detail, pp.143-167.
[89] The relationship between the NUWSS and Lord Robert Cecil is discussed in Vellacott, J., *From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage*, pp.190-192.
[90] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 12, July-September 1912, p.214; no. 13, October-December 1912, p.236.
[91] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 12, July-September 1912, p.214.
[92] Ibid., no. 14, January-March 1913, p.258.
[93] Ibid., no. 12, July-September 1912, p.214.
[94] Cowman. K., ' 'Crossing the Great Divide': Inter-organizational Suffrage Relationships on Merseyside, 1895-1914', pp.37-49.
[95] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 12, July-September 1912, pp.227-230; no. 13, October-December 1912, pp.250-251; no. 14, January- March 1913, p.272.
[96] Ibid., no. 12, July-September 1912, pp.228-230; no. 15, April-June 1913, p.295; no. 13, October-December 1912, p.250, no. 14, January-March 1913, p.271.
[97] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 47, 23 January 1913, cols. 643-645; also Ramsden, J., ed., *Real Old Tory Politics: The Political Diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-35*, p.60.
[98] Ibid., 27 January 1913, cols. 1020-1028.
[99] Holton, S. S., *Feminism and Democracy*, p.93, and Ramsden, J., ed., *Real Old Tory Politics,* p.47-48.
[100] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 15, April-June 1913**,** p.280; Journals of Lady Knightley, 24 January 1913.
[101] Pankhurst, S., *The Suffragette Movement*, pp.434-435; *The Times*, 5 June 1913, p.8; Tickner, L, *The Spectacle of Women*, p.138-140. The *Review* failed to say anything about the incident.
[102] For example, Hume, L. P., *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies,* pp.188-189.
[103] Fawcett, M., in *The Englishwoman,* no. 50, February 1913, p.121.
[104] A group of Unionist MPs, including some Conciliationists, wrote to *The Times* on 5 May 1913, p.10, stating that they would vote for the Dickinson Bill on condition that it was amended at the committee stage so that it became a more limited measure. If this did not happen then they would not vote for a third reading.
[105] HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 52, 6 May 1913, col. 1991; cols. 2001-2006.
[106] Ibid., 5 May 1913, cols. 1721, 1752-1753; 6 May 1913, col. 1974.
[107] Figures taken from HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 52, 6 May 1913, cols. 2001-2006, and Harrison, B., *Separate Spheres*, pp.28-29.
[108] The figures quoted do not include the vote on the women's suffrage amendment to the Government of Ireland Act.
[109] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 16, July-September 1913, p.300, 302-303.
[110] Ibid., no. 16, July-September 1913, pp.338-340; Tickner, L., *The Spectacle of Women*, pp. 141-147.

[111] See Holton, S. S., *Feminism and Democracy*, pp.119-20.
[112] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 18, January-March 1914, p.346.
[113] HL Debates, 5th series, vol. 16, 5-6 May 1914, cols. 7-134.
[114] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 20, July-September 1914, p.386.
[115] NUWSS Executive Committee minutes, 2 April 1914, Catherine Marshall Papers, Cumbria Record Office, D/Mar/3/26, also D/Mar/3/28.
[116] NUWSS Executive Committee minutes, 7 May, 20 May 1914, Catherine Marshall Papers, D/Mar/3/28. The NUWSS did seek the help of the CUWFA to lobby to obtain the vote for Ulster women should there be a provisional government in Ulster. The issue remained unresolved on the outbreak of war.
[117] *Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, no. 20, July-September 1914, p.388.
[118] See Hannam et al., *International Encyclopedia of Women's Suffrage*, p.254.

Conclusion

[1] Hannam, J., 'Women and Politics', in Purvis, J., ed., *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945*: *An Introduction,* London, 1995, pp.226-227.

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