

## SAUNDERSFOOT AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

For the second meeting of the 2018-19 programme the Society welcomed Judith Barrow to give a timely lecture on the 'Suffragettes.' The reform acts of 1867 and 1884 had not only widened the male franchise but gave rise to mass party political organisations often containing women's groups that were soon calling for equal suffrage.

The multitude of local groups began to coalesce into national organisations from the late 1890's. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, known as suffragists and under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett, was formed in 1897 and campaigned for the vote through education, rallies and propaganda, steadily building up a network of local branches. From 1903 though a much more radical and interventionist approach was to be taken by the Women's Social and Political Union under the Pankhursts, often described as autocratic, aggressive and militant. The Union was termed suffragettes by a newspaper. This latter group had limited appeal in Wales, largely because it adopted an anti-Liberal and pro-Conservative stance, believing the latter party was more likely to support its aims. However, Wales returned no Conservatives in the 1906 general election and it was Mrs. Fawcett's movement, with its leanings towards the Liberal party, that achieved the greater influence.

There were also smaller, less well-known groups who were nevertheless active in their own way such as the Women's Freedom League and the Central Society for Women's Suffrage.

Local activists included Alice Abadam of Middleton Hall, now the site of the National Botanic Garden, and Rachel Barrett, to whom the Carmarthen Civic Society recently unveiled blue plaques in the town, and Margaret Haig Thomas, later Lady Rhondda.

The outbreak of war in 1914 placed all campaigns on hold and women quickly entered the workplace and the war effort. More than 100,000 joined the uniformed services and they became nurses, ambulance and tram drivers, engineers, welders and munitions workers. Mrs. Fawcett was to describe the period between 1914 and 1918 as finding women as serfs and left them free.

The Representation of the People Act of 1918 allowed women a limited franchise but contained both an age and property qualification; it was not until 1928 that an equal franchise for men and women was finally achieved.

Our speaker was warmly thanked by Mrs. Rosemary Hayes for her informative lecture. The next talk, on Wednesday 21 November, will be given by Hugh Colley whose subject will be 'Policing in Pembrokeshire.' Lectures take place in the Regency Hall, Saundersfoot at 7.30 and non-members are as ever welcome on the night.