

Socialist and Suffragette

Julia Sarah Anne Cobden-Sanderson
1853-1926

Early days



Julia Sarah Anne Cobden in her late 20s. Albumen cabinet card by unknown photographer, 1881.
Source: National Portrait Gallery London

Julia Sarah Anne Cobden, the seventh child of Richard Cobden and his wife Catherine Williams, (and granddaughter of **William Cobden** and **Millicent Amber**), was born at Westbourne Terrace, Kensington, London, on March 26th 1853. Anne (or Annie), as she was known, spent her early childhood at the family home *Dunford House* near Heyshott in West Sussex. After her father died in 1865, she and her sister Jane attended the Warrington Lodge School in Maida Hill London, and later Anne completed school in Germany.

In 1869 Anne's mother went to live in her native Wales, leaving Anne and her sister Jane to live in London amongst family friends such as George McDonald (author, poet and minister of religion) at *The Retreat* Upper Mall, Hammersmith, which later became the designer William Morris's *Kelmscott House*. Anne later wrote that living there was 'full of excitement and interest. Meals were erratic; but no one complained, for self-forgetfulness was the rule of the house. The belief in Divine Guidance carried us over the difficulties.'¹ She also said later after William Morris took ownership: 'the days of Christian Socialism came to an end at Hammersmith, to be succeeded for a time in the same house by the more strenuous days of Marxian Socialism'.² She was to later join Morris's Hammersmith Socialists.

Anne also displayed an adventurous spirit. In 1874 she and her sister Ellen travelled to Algeria to join Sir Robert Playfair's expedition to the Aures Mountains.³

Romance in Siena

Anne and Jane Cobden were friends with the leader of the Arts and Crafts movement, William Morris and his wife Jane. In 1881, the three women travelled to Siena for a holiday, where Anne met her future husband Thomas James Sanderson, also a friend of Morris's, who was in Siena for respite from his work as a barrister

(this may not have been their first meeting, as one writer in the *New York Periodical*, says Anne met him at the house of the painter Burne-Jones). The two had much in common sharing progressive social and political views and Thomas was an admirer of Anne's father. The next year on August 5th they married in Marylebone, London, each taking the hyphenated surname Cobden-Sanderson. This was quite unconventional for the time, but as Anne had no surviving brothers, she wanted to ensure the continuation of her father's name, and as Thomas said, she didn't want to lose her name.



l to r: Thomas James Sanderson, Jane Cobden, Jane Morris, Anne Cobden. *The Pilgrims of Siena* albumen cabinet card by Paolo Lombardi 1881. Source: National Portrait Gallery London



The photographic studio of Paolo Lombardi in Siena and detail of name plate. Photo: Mary McGillivray 2017

The Doves Bindery

Thomas became dissatisfied with his profession and in 1883, wanting to engage in manual work, he turned to bookbinding at the suggestion of Jane Morris. Anne was very supportive, and persuaded him that if they were careful, they could live on her income. Thomas soon learned the bookbinding craft, and also taught Anne who

assisted him when she could, combining this with rearing two small children: Richard born in 1884 and Stella Gabrielle born in 1886. In 1893, through Anne's vital financial support, Thomas was able to establish the Dove's Bindery at *The Nook* 15 Upper Mall, Hammersmith, just down the lane from *Kelmscott House*. Thomas made bindings for some of Morris's books, including copies of the famous *Kelmscott Chaucer* and Morris leased some rooms from the Cobden-Sandersons for the Kelmscott Press. Anne and Thomas sometimes lunched with the Morris's and spent time with them at Morris's countryside *Kelmscott Manor*.



Above: Blue Plaque at 15 Upper Mall Hammersmith commemorating Thomas Cobden-Sanderson. Anne is not mentioned! Right: The Dove's Bindery, 15 Upper Mall Hammersmith. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2016
Below: Thomas Cobden-Sanderson 1902 by unknown photographer. Source: Wikimedia Commons



Thomas was an excellent craftsman however he was also an obsessive perfectionist causing him to overwork, becoming physically strained and generally unwell, resulting in the need for many holiday breaks. He also suffered frequent bouts of depression that must have impacted on Anne and the children. From 1897 to 1898, Anne stayed with the children in Lausanne, Switzerland. Thomas accepted this as Anne's need for freedom: 'the freedom of her life suits her' and that it was 'the better way for ourselves and our children'.⁴

Doves type dispute

In 1900, with Anne's financial support of £1600, Thomas and the photo-engraver and printer Emery Walker, set up the Doves Press with the bindery (the nearby Kelmscott Press had closed in 1898, a few years after Morris's death). Here they created the elegant Doves typeface, demonstrated most famously in their print of the English Bible. Their work achieved international recognition and was, and still is, highly prized by dealers and collectors.

However, the partnership with Walker did not work out and in 1909 when the partnership was dissolved, a nasty dispute began centring on the ownership of the Doves typeface. Breaking a previously agreed arrangement, Thomas was determined that Walker should not have the type, so without Anne or anyone else's knowledge, he stored it away and finally between 1916 and 1917, dumped (or in his words 'bequeathed'⁵) the type into the River Thames from the nearby Hammersmith Bridge.



Emery Walker (left) and Thomas Cobden-Sanderson. Source: *The Economist*

Walker sues Anne

After Thomas's death in 1922, Emery Walker sued Anne for the cost of producing the typeface and for lost earnings. They disagreed on whether the Doves typeface made the books famous or the books made the typeface famous, Anne arguing the latter. The matter was settled out of court, Anne paying Walker around £700.

Hammersmith socialists

Anne and her sisters were brought up to have a social conscience and to assist their local community. This began with engaging with their local village in Heyshott where they grew up. As teenagers the girls helped out at the local school and workhouses. Later from 1910-1922 Anne would become a Poor Law Guardian at Hammersmith where she lived. In 1879, the Cobden sisters founded the Working Men's Club at Heyshott that provided a coffee house and recreational and meeting venue for the local farm labourers.

In 1890 Anne joined the Hammersmith Socialist Society that had been established by William Morris and Emery Walker. In 1902 she joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and became treasurer of their metropolitan branch in London, and in 1906 was one of five women delegates at the 6th annual conference of the Labour Representation Committee. In 1905 she was a founding member of the Right to Work committee of the ILP that drew attention to unemployment problems. (In 1909 she and other women socialists led a march of the wives and children of the unemployed of London.) Also, in 1905 the ILP published a pamphlet she wrote on her father: *Richard Cobden and the Land of the People*, which included a foreword by the Labour leader Kier Hardie, and represented Cobden's views on land reform.

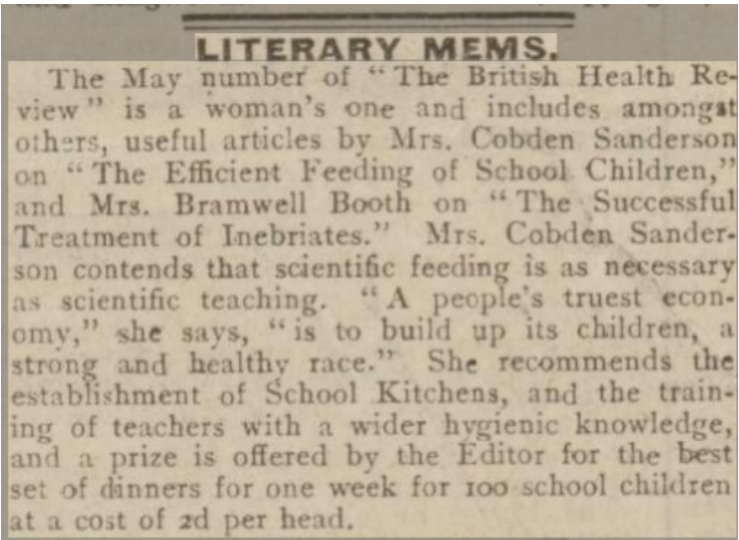
Anne took these a step further by promoting public ownership of land and in 1909 she organised a lecture at *Dunford House* to establish a movement for the public ownership of land.



The Hammersmith Socialist Society. Anne (seated) and Thomas (standing) are seen at the far right. William Morris is seated left of centre holding a paper. Photo: possibly by Emery Walker c1891-2. Source: victorianweb.org

Healthy diets for children

A particular passion of Anne's was children's wellbeing and she did a lot of work assisting the poor in London's east end where the problems were the greatest. She was an active supporter of the ground-breaking Bow Children's Clinic (established by fellow socialists, the sisters Margaret and Rachel MacMillan) that provided health



From *The Cornishman* May 27th 1909. Source: British Newspaper Archive

services, including dental, surgical and general health and fitness education. With the MacMillan sisters Anne campaigned for compulsory medical inspections and the provision of nutritionally designed school meals (way ahead of Jamie Oliver). With Margaret McMillan, Anne wrote a pamphlet for the ILP entitled *London's Children. How to Feed Them and How Not to Feed Them*. She emphasised that 'the feeding of children..... is a NATIONAL question'.⁶

Vegetarianism

From a young age Anne was very interested in issues concerning the environment and animals, and so from the age of 20, she became a vegetarian. Years later, with several other concerned women, Anne established the New Food Reform Movement that aimed to draw people's attention to the health and environmental problems of the traditional meat-based English diet. She asserted that the traditional English diet was wasteful, harmful to health and the digestion. In 1908 she wrote *How I Became A Vegetarian* printed at the Dove's Press.

A law breaker and maker

Part of Anne's socialism was the need to affect changes in the status of women, who at that time did not have the right to vote. In the late 19th century women had been gradually taking part in local governance by being permitted to stand for office in areas such as school boards and parish councils. (In 1889 Anne's sister Jane was one of the first two women to be elected to the London City Council.) There was also growing agitation to draw public attention to improving women's pay and working conditions through the establishment of organisations such as the Women's Trade Union League set up in 1888, and protests such as the strike by the women working at Bryant and May's match factory.

Anne's mother had progressive views concerning women's status and had signed the women's suffrage petition (known as the 'Ladies Petition') in 1866, one of the initial actions that sparked off the organised women's suffrage movement. This inspired Anne and her sisters' involvement in the cause for women's rights and in 1871, while still a teenager, Anne attended the Women's Suffrage Conference in London. In 1897 The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) was formed, and Anne became a member. Their purpose was to achieve the vote for women through lobbying political MPs and parties.

Time and again, liberal politicians promised their support, but if not voted down in parliament, they backed away from their commitments for other political reasons. Anne lost patience with the NUWSS's lack of success in affecting any change, and so in 1905 she joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a group run by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, who were prepared to use militant and illegal tactics to achieve their goals. Some of their strategies included civil disobedience such as protesting in and around government buildings, violence such as window smashing and setting mailboxes alight, and hunger strikes when imprisoned. In the press this group was termed 'suffragettes' and their motto was 'Deeds not words'.



Emmeline Pankhurst being arrested at King's Gate in May 1914. Source: Wikimedia Commons



Hammersmith WSPU banner.
Source: Museum of London

Convict E28



Anne in her Holloway Prison garb in 1906.
Photo in *The Herald of Health* paper
November 1907. Source: West Sussex
Record Office

Anne was a true suffragette, however as a pacifist she did not engage in violent demonstration, but instead demonstrated through civil disobedience and making many public protests. In 1906 on October 23rd, Anne was one of ten women (with Emmeline Pankhurst and the English-Australian Dora Montefiore) to be arrested for protesting in the lobby of the House of Commons. The women were charged with 'using threatening and abusive words and behaviour with intent to provoke a breach of the peace'⁷ and, as they each refused to pay the £10 fine, were sentenced to two months in Holloway Prison. In court Anne made the statement: 'We have talked so much for the Cause now let us suffer for it... I am a law breaker because I want to be a law maker.'⁸ Her sisters Jane and Ellen were there to support her during her court appearance.

Shock and disbelief

The sight of such respectable middle-class women being arrested, prosecuted and sent to prison, quickly got the attention of the press and gave the cause an even higher profile. The writer George Bernard Shaw, a friend of Anne's, wrote a letter

to *The Times*, expressing his disgust that Anne was 'one of nicest women in England suffering from the coarsest indignity'⁹. Her friend Millicent Garret Fawcett, a leader of the NUWSS, also wrote to *The Times*: 'I have known Mrs Cobden-Sanderson for 30 years. I find it absolutely impossible to believe that she bit, or scratched, or screamed, or behaved otherwise than like the refined lady she is.'¹⁰ She also visited Anne in prison and described the conditions: 'not even a chair to sit on and only three potatoes for supper as she was a vegetarian.'¹¹

Also published in *The Times*, a letter from Mrs. Fenwick Miller, mother of one of the arrested suffragettes, Irene. In her letter she writes:

'....But it so happens that you have hauled to gaol educated, cultured, refined (and, I may add beautiful-looking) ladies. You have taken, and are treating as a felon, a daughter of the great Cobden, the man who gave you the cheap loaf. Sweet, gentle, and yet courageous, like himself, all his daughters have been steadfastly working for good causes all their lives.....'¹²

Holloway prison

The suffragettes' introduction to Holloway prison is described by Dora Montefiore in her 1927 book *From a Victorian to a Modern*¹³:

'..... we were ordered to strip to our chemises or combinations and then to await further orders. The next scene was taking down our hair and searching rather perfunctorily our heads for possible undesirable inhabitants, after which a prison chemise, made of a sort of sacking, and generously stamped with the broad arrow, was handed to each of us, and I found myself exchanging my warm wool and silk combinations for this decidedly chilly and ungainly garment. The bath ordeal was not serious; we had only to stand in a few inches of doubtful-looking warm water and then put on the various articles of prison clothing provided for us. Each of us had a flannel petticoat made with enormous pleats round the waist, a dress of green serge made on the same ample lines and an apron, a check duster, which we were told was the handkerchief supplied, and a small green cape made with a hood, for outdoor exercise, and a white linen cap tied under the chin..... We were then shut up in our respective cells with a cup of cocoa and a piece of bread and left for the night.'

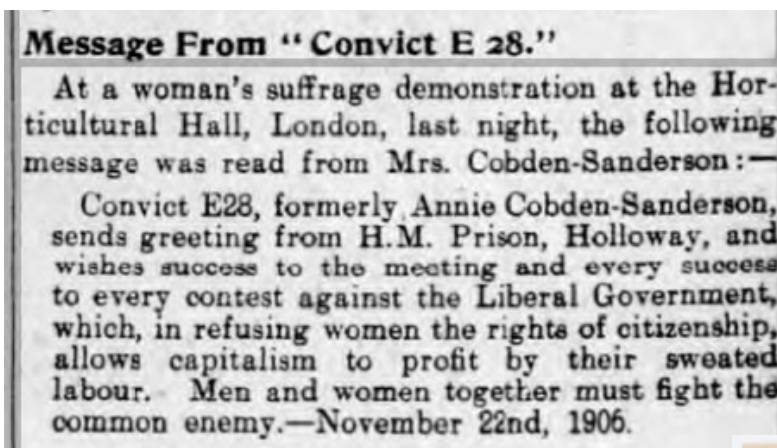
Dora also describes the cell in detail:

'The cells had a cement floor, whitewashed walls and a window high up so that one could not see out of it. It was barred outside and the glass was corrugated so that one could not even get a glimpse of the sky..... The furnishing of the cell consisted of a wooden plank bed stood up against the wall, a mattress rolled up in one corner, two or three tin vessels, a cloth for cleaning and polishing and some bath brick. On the shelf were a Bible, a wooden spoon, a salt cellar There was also a stool without a back, and inside the mattress when unrolled for the night and placed on the wooden stretcher were two thin blankets, a pillow and some rather soiled-looking sheets. One tin utensil was for holding water, the second for sanitary purposes, and the third was a small tin mug for holding cocoa. I may mention in passing that only one cloth was provided for cleaning the sanitary tin pail, the water container and

the tin mug, and these all had to be polished with bath-brick, and placed in certain positions in readiness for cell inspection.'

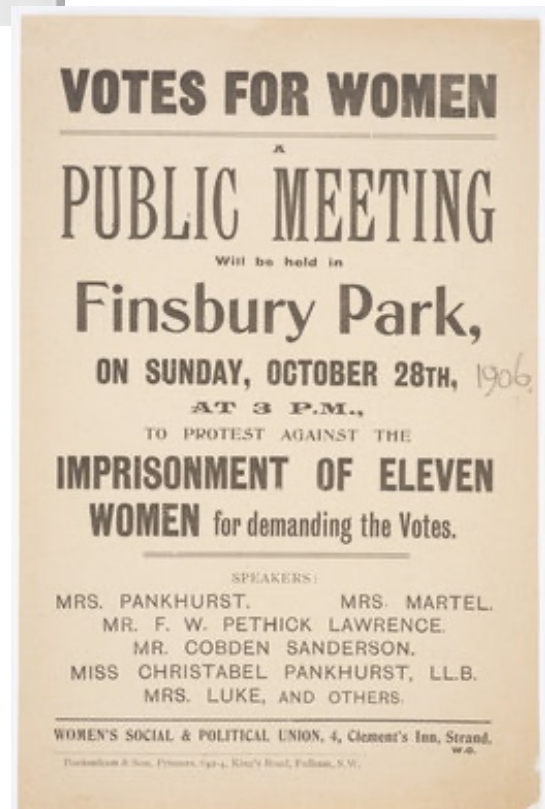
Reforms in gaol

The two-month sentences were later halved, but during Anne's one-month imprisonment, in a cell 12 feet by 6 feet (approx. 3.6 x 1.8 metres), she managed to bring about two important reforms: ensuring clean bed linen was provided and the option of a vegetarian diet (hopefully including more than potatoes). Her prison diary describes the boring routines and isolation of prison life and the effects it had on her health. She was in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day and for Anne, because she refused to go to chapel, was in solitary for an extra half an hour on Sundays. On the last pages of her diary she restates her beliefs that in order for the current industrial situation to be improved, women must play a role and therefore must have the means to do so – the vote. She also continued to make public protests from her prison cell:



Left: From the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* November 23rd 1906. Source: British Newspaper Archive 1906. Below: Poster for a protest meeting to support the imprisoned suffragettes where Anne's husband was one of the speakers. Source: Museum of London

On November 24th, the suffragettes were released from prison and on December 11th, the NUWSS gave a banquet to celebrate at the *Savoy Hotel*. Anne was a guest of honour, and her sisters Jane and Ellen were there in support. The shortened sentences seemed to be due to the fact that a by-election for the new Liberal government was soon to be held in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, and that the imprisonment of someone such as Anne with her Liberal pedigree would not help the campaign. So, directly after her release from Holloway, Anne travelled to Huddersfield to continue her protests. Having these middle-class and a few upper-class women at the forefront of the militant women's movement, gained much publicity and encouraged interest across social divides as well as gaining more financial support. Anne and Thomas also donated to the WSPU.



The 'Siege of Montefiore' at Hammersmith

Anne and Charlotte Despard also spoke at rallies in England to defend women, when, as a civil disobedience protest, refused to pay taxes and therefore had received penalties from the government, such as having their property seized. The Women's Tax Resistance League (WTRL), that Anne helped to found in 1909, protested 'No vote, no tax'. In the WFL's newspaper *The Vote*, Anne wrote many articles on the subject and spoke at many street rallies in defence of these women and men. As well as attending

One such protestor was Dora Montefiore (as was mentioned earlier having been arrested with Anne in October 1906), who lived at *Clare Lodge* 32 Upper Mall Hammersmith just down the road from Anne. For 6 weeks from May to July 1906, Dora and her maid barricaded themselves in *Clare Lodge* after not paying her taxes and refusing to allow the bailiffs in to confiscate her belongings. As Dora wrote in her book *From a Victorian to a Modern* (1927):

'The road in front of the house was not a thoroughfare, as a few doors further down past the late Mr. William Morris's home of "Kelmscott," at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Cobden-Sanderson, there occurred one of those quaint alley-ways guarded by iron posts, which one finds constantly on the borders of the Thames and in old seaside villages. The roadway was, therefore, ideal for the holding of a meeting....'¹⁴

Over this period 36 Upper Mall became the focus of suffragette protests - no taxation without representation! I'm sure Anne would have attended some of these demonstrations in her own neighbourhood.



Dora Montefiore c1904
Source: Wikipedia



Dora Montefiore making a speech from her window at 32 Upper Mall Hammersmith. Source: LBHF Libraries



WTRL poster. Part of their 'No Vote No Tax' campaign 1912. Source: ourhistory-hayes.blogspot.com

Women's Freedom League 1907

The famous suffragette family of Emmeline Pankhurst and daughters Christabel, Sylvia and Adela led the WSPU. But their autocratic decision-making was increasingly off-siding some of their fellow members, as well as the promoting of arson as a protest tactic. In October more than 70 women left the WSPU to form the Women's Freedom League (WFL) to pursue their own non-violent militant campaign. Anne was one of these defectors and a hard worker for the WFL making many outdoor speeches and continuing street protesting. (The WSPU had also withdrawn their support from the Labour Party, and Anne was still an ILP member.) The WFL's non-violent militancy included picketing, street protests, pamphleteering, refusal to pay taxes and refusal to fill out the census form - Anne is missing from the 1911 census. *The Vote*, the newspaper of the WFL, reported on March 25th 1911 at a meeting of the Uxbridge Women's Tax Resistance League:

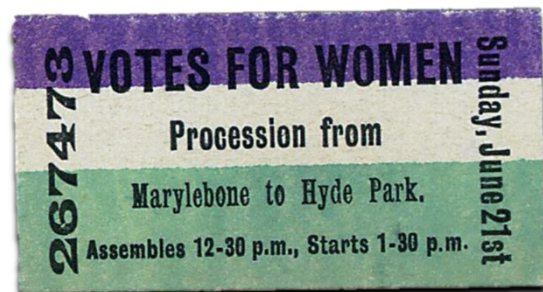


WFL badge c1909-14.
Source: Museum of London

'.....Mrs Cobden Sanderson made an urgent plea to the women of Uxbridge to boycott the Census, and gave most lucid and logical reasons why the women should refuse to be counted, and endeavoured to show the serious results which follow to women from legislation without their consent.'

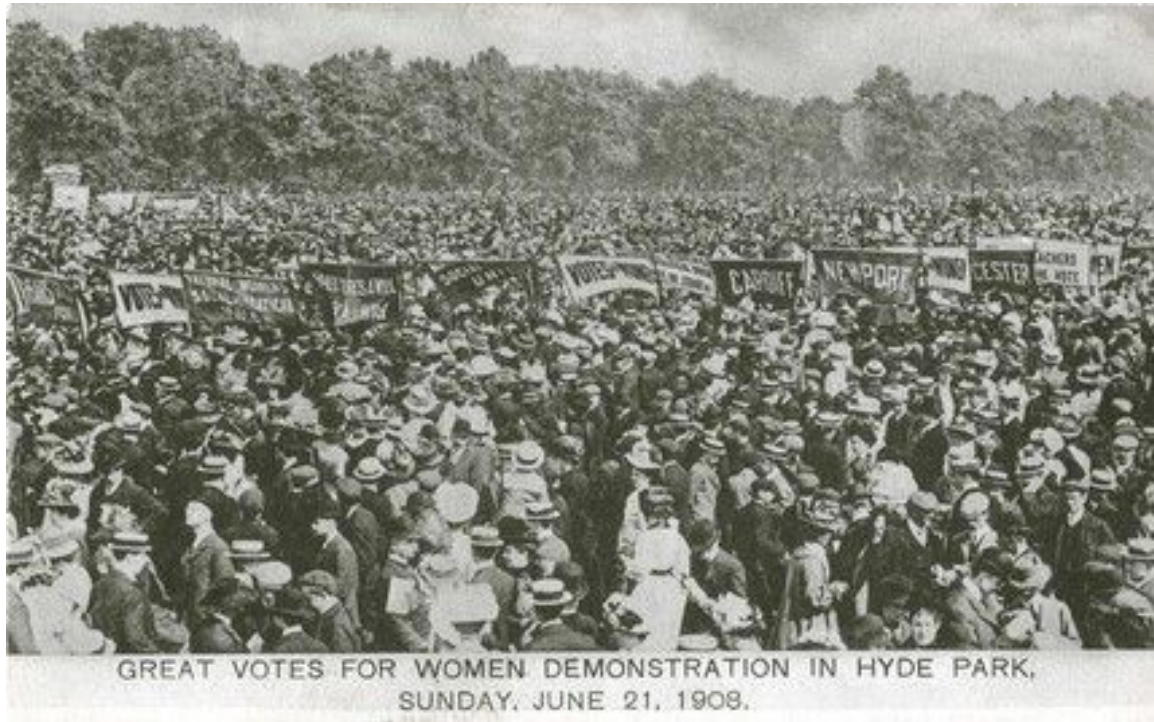
Women's Sunday 1908

The campaign by all women's suffrage groups was ramping up. In 1908 on June 13th the NUWSS invited the WFL to participate in its street demonstration. A week later on June 21st Women's Sunday, 250,000 people gathered in London's Hyde Park, in support of women's suffrage. The rally was organised by the WSPU, and it is interesting that Anne was not amongst the 80 speakers who addressed the huge crowds, especially as she had recently returned from a successful lecture tour in the USA (more of that later). Perhaps there was still some acrimony on the part of the WSPU regarding the WFL split the previous year.



Ticket for the Women's Procession in June 1908. Source: metalculture.com

However, Anne knew the WSPU leader, Emmeline Pankhurst well, and when Emmeline was released from prison in January 1909, Anne and Thomas presented her with a message of support in purple and green ink on white vellum, and bound at the Dove's Bindery. Indeed, at the International Women's Suffrage Congress in Budapest in June 1913, fellow WFL member Charlotte Despard and Anne gave speeches protesting the exclusion of the militant suffrage groups from full voting rights at the congress.



The huge crowds at Hyde Park London for the Women's Sunday suffrage demonstration. Source: Museum of London

Concerned husband



Emmeline Pankhurst in prison clothes 1908.
Source: britannica.com

The physical state of Emmeline Pankhurst due to her several gaol sentences over the previous year, worried Thomas, who was concerned that Anne would be arrested again. He wrote in his diary on February 1st 1909:

'On Sunday afternoon, yesterday, Mrs Pankhurst called. She was gentle and affectionate, but, as it seemed to us all, tired. The prison immurement seemed to have damped her fire..... This is an odious result of prison, and an argument against its use as a weapon of revolt. Annie must not go again.'¹⁵

Further arrests

But Anne's activism continued. Only a few days after Thomas's diary entry Anne participated in the United Procession of Women (aka the Mud March - due to the weather) at Hyde Park London. Then on August 19th 1909 Anne was arrested with Charlotte Despard, whilst picketing outside No.10 Downing Street with the objective of handing a petition to Prime Minister Asquith. Without Anne's consent, someone paid her fine so she avoided another prison sentence. Was it her husband?



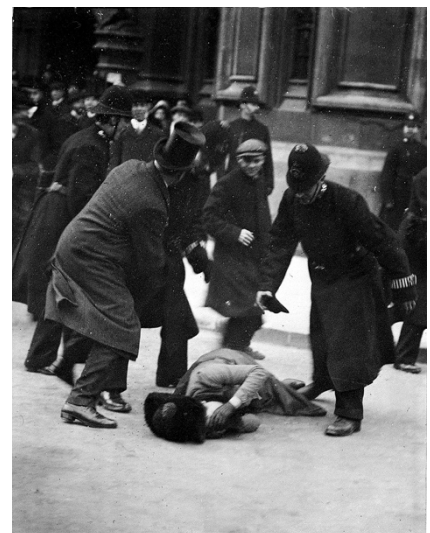
Charlotte Despard (centre) with Anne waiting for the Prime Minister outside 10 Downing Street just prior to their arrest. Source: National Portrait Gallery London

'Black Friday'

On Friday November 18th 1910 Anne was hand-picked by Emmeline Pankhurst to be one of nine other women in the vanguard of a protest march in Parliament Square. The protest was in response to the government shelving debate on the Parliamentary Franchise [Women] Bill. After a WSPU meeting at Caxton Hall, the 300 women marched to Parliament Square where Emmeline and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson were to present a petition to the Prime Minister. However, he refused to see them and they were escorted out of the building. At this point the protesters were infuriated and attempted to enter the building. The police response was brutal and the confrontation continued for 6 hours ending with 115 women and 4 men being arrested.



Crowds in Parliament Square during the 'Black Friday' protest 1910. Source: diomedia.com



Suffrage demonstrator 50-year-old Ada Wright thrown to the ground during the Black Friday protest in 1910. Source: The National Archives

'Black Friday' as it became known, was notorious for the violent methods, physical and sexual, in which the police dealt with the female demonstrators. Many felt that police were deliberately humiliating the suffragettes in front of the many male onlookers by pulling up their dresses, grabbing their breasts and throwing them into crowds of men. As Home Secretary, Winston Churchill was blamed for the police actions. His wife was a close friend of Anne's, and when he saw Anne in the melee, he called to police to 'Drive that woman away!'¹⁶ However, she was arrested (her third arrest) but not imprisoned, because without her consent, Churchill had paid her fine. (The next day Churchill decided to drop the charges against the suffragettes, fearing an enquiry into the police brutality.) Anne wrote a letter to Churchill, published in the newspapers, demanding an apology from him for falsely claiming she was trying to throw stones at the Prime Minister.

**MRS COBDEN SANDERSON
REBUKES CHURCHILL,
AND DEMANDS APOLOGY
FOR HIS ACTION IN DOWNING
STREET.**

On the 14th December Mrs Cobden Sanderson addressed a letter to the Home Secretary in reference to a statement which Mr Churchill is reported as having made—"that Mrs Cobden Sanderson was in Downing Street to throw stones at the Prime Minister's windows." She wrote:—

"I was in Downing Street on the occasion to which I presume you refer as one of a deputation to the Prime Minister. I am, for personal reasons, a passive resister, and I had no intention of throwing stones at the Prime Minister's windows. I had been left on the pavement by the police exhausted by the struggle in which the police, obstructing our approach to the Prime Minister's residence and driving or attempting to drive us back, had obliged us to engage, and I had just risen to my feet, and was resting against a window of the Foreign Office, when I saw you approach.

"I went forward to speak to you, for you were not unknown to me, when, without inquiry as to my purpose or pause to hear what I had to say, you ordered the police who accompanied you to remove 'that woman.' I protested, but your order was executed, and I was 'removed.' You are a Secretary of State, but your office does not release even a member of the present Government from the obligations of a gentleman even where they have not been naturally engrafted, and it should make the holder of it particularly careful as to the truth of his observations and the justice and propriety of his public conduct.

"If you have been correctly reported you have in this case made a statement which I know to be false, and you have made it in defence of conduct which you know to be indefensible. I await your apology, and am,
"Yours faithfully,
"ANNE COBDEN SANDERSON."

Suffragettes.

Not to be Prosecuted.

LONDON, November 19.

Mrs. Pankhurst, Mrs. Ayrton, Mrs. Cobden Sanderson, Dr. (Mrs.) Garrett Anderson, and the Princess Dhuleep Singh headed the first deputation of suffragettes who attempted to invade the House of Commons yesterday. Among those arrested were Miss Ellen Gibb and Mrs. Morrison, a daughter of Sir Terence Murray. It is declared that the demonstrations will be continued until the dissolution of Parliament. Lady Stout, who accompanied the deputation said that the policemen were the roughest and most bloated looking people she had ever seen. Lady Solomon, who is 80 years of age, was knocked down in the scuffle. It is understood that the authorities will not prosecute the persons who were arrested, and they will be discharged.

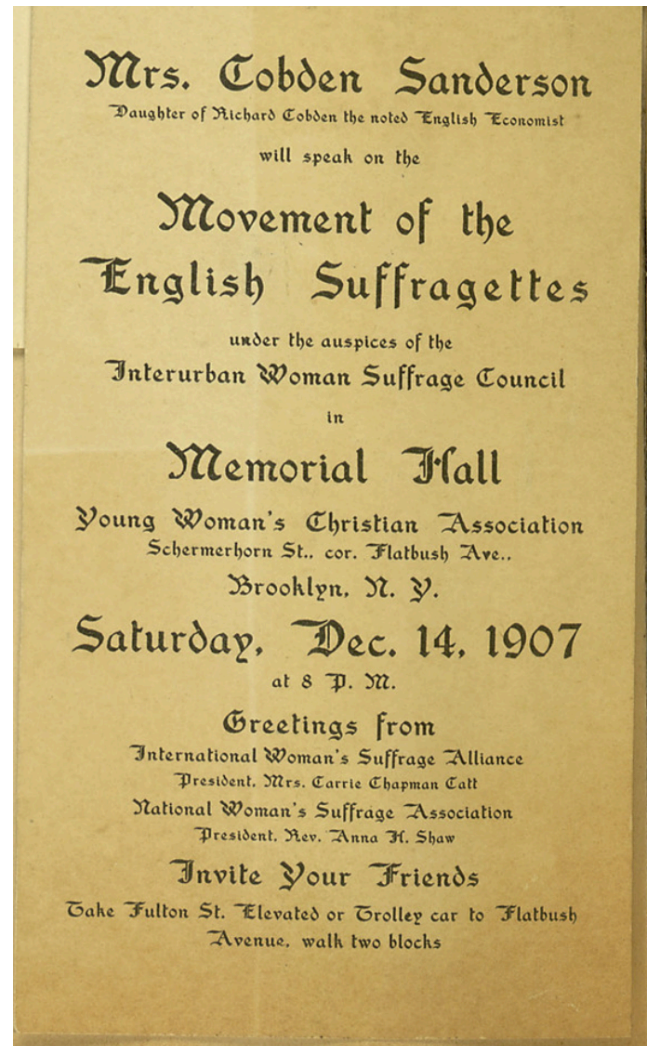
Left: From *The Courier* December 22nd 1910. following the Black Friday protests and Anne's subsequent arrest Source: British Newspaper Archive. Right: From *The Telegraph* (Qld.) November 21st 1910. Source: Trove (National Library Australia)

USA tour

Anne's earlier prison reputation was useful in gaining publicity and interest overseas in the suffrage movement. Suffrage societies in the USA, wanted to learn about the English protest methods, so in November 1907 at the invitation of American suffragist Harriot Stanton Blatch, Anne went to the USA to give a lecture tour sponsored by the Equality League for Self-Supporting Women and the College Equal Suffrage League.



Above: Anne giving her speech *Why I Went to Prison* at *Bryn Mawr* women's college Pennsylvania USA. Source: C.C. Catt Albums, *Bryn Mawr College Library*. Right: Poster for one of Anne's suffragette talks in New York. Source: picryl.com



Criticising 'comfortable' Americans

In her lecture *Why I Went to Prison*, given at *Bryn Mawr*, the women's college in Pennsylvania (Thomas was also invited to speak on 'The Book Beautiful'), she emphasised the working class and trade union origins of the suffrage movement and her dismay at how upper-class women, particularly Americans, in their comfortable lifestyles did not support equal suffrage:

'The opposition here is not from the men, but from the women of the upper classes, who say they have everything they want, and do not care for the sufferings of others.'¹⁷

Always appreciative of her own privileged upbringing, Anne could not tolerate the well-off denying others opportunities. Going to prison was one way of making, what she considered for her, was a small sacrifice for the greater good:

'When you have a cause, the ideal seems real, and all the discomfort, all the ridicule, all the blame sink to nothing.'¹⁸

Deportation threats

Due to her criminal record it seemed safer for Anne to enter the United States via Canada, but in December during her tour, she was threatened with deportation. However, these threats only served to create more publicity for her lectures. She made another suffrage lecture tour of the USA with her daughter Stella in 1913.



MRS. COBDEN-SANDERSON, THE ENGLISH SUFFRAGETTE, ADDRESSING MEN IN MADISON SQUARE.

Anne speaking in New York at Madison Square 1908. Source: News cutting in the Cobden collection at the West Sussex Record Office

Sisterhood of Sorrow 1914

In August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany which necessarily slowed the suffrage movement's activities. However, many suffragists (but not all) including WFL members were pacifists like Anne. Over December 1914 and January 1915,

Manchester suffragist Emily Hobhouse circulated an 'Open Christmas Letter' addressed to the women of Germany and Austria, declaring their abhorrence of war and their desire to stay united internationally over the women's suffrage issue, no matter what conflict there was between their countries. Known as the *Sisterhood of Sorrow* letter, it was signed by 101 women including Anne and her cousin Helena Cobden Hirst.

Votes at last! for some

Finally, after the end of the war in 1918, and with support of the new Prime Minister David Lloyd George, the right to vote was extended to some women. The Representation of the People Act was passed that granted women over the age of 30, with property or university qualifications, the vote. Also, the Parliamentary Qualification of Women Act was passed to enable women to stand for parliament. That year a General Election was held and Anne worked to support Charlotte Despard, who stood as the Labour candidate for North Battersea. It took another 10 years before every citizen over the age of 21 was allowed to vote. Unfortunately, Anne would not live long enough to witness this.

Family 'affairs'

Anne's daughter Stella, also a suffragist and author, married in 1910 Ferdinand Speyer and son Richard, who became a publisher, married in 1912 Dorothea Dircks. In June 1922, both siblings divorced - their spouses were having an affair - with each other! Richard later married Gwladys Leslie.

Then in September, Thomas aged 81, died at home in Upper Mall, Hammersmith. He had suffered from heart weakness and died peacefully. By this time Anne had also experienced the loss of three of her sisters: Margaret in 1891, Ellen in 1914, and Kate in 1916. According to her son Richard, Anne never got over the loss of her husband. In July 1926 he published his father's diaries. Anne continued to be active through her 60s and into her early 70s, and remained a dedicated socialist and member of the Labour Party. As a Hammersmith Poor Law Guardian, she concentrated on the needs of the poor in her local area, and brought their issues, particularly that of unemployment and the welfare of children, to the public's attention in the local paper, the *Hammersmith Pioneer*.

Anne's death

In 1926 Anne spent 8 months in the USA, visiting old friends and supporters in California. Her son believed this trip taxed her strength considerably. A few days before she died, Anne attended the silver wedding anniversary of suffrage friends Frederick and Emmeline Pethick Lawrence. On November 2nd 1926, Anne died at home at Upper Mall, Hammersmith after three days' illness and died peacefully. Her ashes were placed with her husband's in a wall near the bottom of their garden, and have since been washed away by floods from the River Thames.

Following Anne's death many newspapers paid tribute to her character and important contribution to social progress: The *Daily Telegraph* wrote she was 'a

character of intellectual power' and the *Manchester Guardian* described her as a 'singularly gentle lady who did rather startling things.'



Anne and Thomas, probably at their Hammersmith home. Source: LBHF Libraries

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2020

hurleyskidmorehistory.com

Notes:

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- ¹ Salmon, Nicholas - *MacDonald, Morris and "The Retreat"* (1994)
- ² Salmon, Nicholas - *MacDonald, Morris and "The Retreat"* (1994)
- ³ Sir Robert Playfair's nephew Sir Nigel Ross Playfair, renown actor-manager of the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith, commemorated her work by setting up the Anne Cobden-Sanderson Fund.
- ⁴ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
- ⁵ The Economist Dec 21st 2013
- ⁶ Richardson, Sarah - *Transforming the Body Politic* p55 from *Picturing Women's Health* (2014)
- ⁷ Rosen, Andrew - *Rise Up Women* p74 (1974)
- ⁸ Cook, Clara Manasian - "*I am a law breaker because I want to be a law maker*" from *These Dangerous Women* (2015 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom)
- ⁹ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
- ¹⁰ Fowler, Fiona - *Local Suffragettes* (LBHF Libraries and Archives 2018)
- ¹¹ Phillips, Melanie - *The Ascent of Woman* p184 (2003)
- ¹² *The Times* October 29th 1906 Letter from Florence Fenwick Miller.
- ¹³ Montefiore, Dora - *From a Victorian to a Modern* (1927), Chapter VIII. 'Holloway Prison'
- ¹⁴ Montefiore, Dora - *From a Victorian to a Modern* (1927), Chapter VI. 'Women Must Vote for the Laws They Obey and the Taxes They Pay'
- ¹⁵ *The Journals of Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson 1879-1922 Vol 2* (1926)
- ¹⁶ Crawford, Elizabeth - *Suffrage Stories/Walks: Anne Cobden Sanderson and 15 Upper Mall, Hammersmith* (2015 *Woman and Her Sphere*)
- ¹⁷ DuBois, Ellen Carol - *Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage* (1997)
- ¹⁸ DuBois, Ellen Carol - *Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage* (1997)

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