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NEWS STORY

Champion Story

Friday, 18 October 2013 (3044278)



Picture no:

Day suffragette Dora hid from Churchill in resort theatre...

by Ollie Cowan

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ollie.cowan@champnews.com

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Hello and welcome back to Strange But True: Fascinating Facts on Southport! Once again I must thank you all for your kind comments about last week's column and an added thanks to the readers who discovered our hidden treasure!

Secondly I must apologise for leading some of you astray, as this week's column won't be featuring the macabre history of a Chapel Street department store. That particular topic will feature soon but whilst researching for my column I stumbled across a far more interesting topic I'd like to talk about. It concerns Winston Churchill, a rather angry woman and the Suffragettes...

In 1909 the Suffragette movement was well underway and women across the country were campaigning to be allowed to vote. A fair and eventually victorious request of course! But as history tells us, like modern women, they definitely made their voices heard! Plenty of protests made national headlines with one, dubbed at the time the suffragette's most successful coup', taking place right here in Southport.

The two most famous suffragettes are arguably Emmeline Pankhurst, the leader of the movement, and Emily Davison, who threw herself under King George V's horse at the Epsom Derby in 1913. Although their names are etched in history, there are three women who took protesting to a whole height...about fifty feet to be exact.

Dora Marsden, a Manchester suffragette, was sitting in her front room one afternoon when she got wind of an impending Liberal meeting at Southport's Empire Theatre - to be attended by no other than Winston Churchill.

Blessed with this knowledge Dora decided the best thing she could do, seen as Churchill was already in favour of the suffragette movement and didn't need influencing further, was leave well alone and let the meeting run its course.

And so ends this week's column...wait, what? She decided to sneak into the Empire Theatre, climb a ladder and lock herself in the theatre's loft the day before so she could stage a protest? Yep that sounds about right.

Dora, aided by her brothers (sorry - sisters!) in arms, Miss Etherley and Miss Tolson, gained access to the theatre the night before, climbed a ladder into the loft and retracted the ladder so she could not be reached when giving Churchill a good piece of her mind.

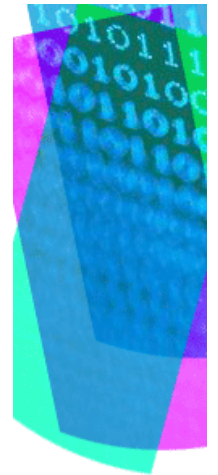
The trio spent a very cold night shivering and covered in dust for their cause and the opportunity eventually came as the Greatest Briton of All Time took to the stage to address the crowd.

As The Examiner reported back in 1910: "several thousand people were listening quietly to Churchill, who was talking about people's representations in parliament, when a voice from the rafters cried 'these do not represent the women!'

Nobody could find where the voice had come from for a few minutes, until Winston clocked onto the fact he was being heckled from a higher power.

Looking quite smug, the trio watched as people flustered trying to work out a way to get them down.

The audience cried: "chuck her down" and their wish was almost granted as a steward, who



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managed to make his way to the loft, began to scuffle with Dora and risked them both falling to the floor below.

At this point you have to feel a little sympathy for the Liberal 'media officer' who had reassured Churchill before he arrived that the audience had been hand picked and said: "I personally guarantee everyone on the audience will be well behaved.

Churchill was left looking on in despair, no doubt thinking to himself that he'd never face a greater difficulty in his lifetime than removing three women from the loft of a Southport Theatre...

After consulting with local historians and my nan, I've compiled a fairly substantial list of Southport's fascinating facts - however I always welcome any suggestions that you may have! Feel free to get in touch via ollie.cowan@champnews.com or call me direct on 01704 392 406.

-Back-

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Southport PR9 0QA
United Kingdom
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01704 392 392