

Woman and her Sphere

Suffrage Stories: Emily Wilding Davison On The Eve Of The Derby 1913

On Tuesday 3 June 1913 Emily Davison was present at the Suffragette Summer Fair, held in the Empress Rooms, on the north side of Kensington High Street, just west of Kensington Palace.



<http://womanandhersphere.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/summer-fair.jpg>

Advertising the 'All in a Summer Fair, June 1913

The WSPU's fund-raising 'All In a Garden Fair' saw the hired room transformed into 'a beautiful rose garden under an Italian sky', lined with pergolas wreathed in pink rambling roses. In the centre of the hall was an illuminated fountain, which was set in a grass lawn, surrounded by clipped box trees and garden seats. This verdant scene was surrounded by stalls selling WSPU merchandise and all kinds of goods donated by members. The Ladies' Aeolian Orchestra and the Actresses' Franchise League contributed live performances. A centrepiece of the Fair was a statue of Joan of Arc, who had come to prominence with her beatification in 1909 and by 1913 was very much a symbolic heroine to

suffragettes.

Emily Davison's biographer, Gertrude Colmore, reported that Emily attended the Fair with her 'Comrade', Mary Leigh (<http://womanandhersphere.com/2012/08/06/suffrage-stories-what-else-is-in-emily-wilding-davisons-grave/>), and that 'Saluting, she stood there, reading the words upon the pedestal, "Fight on, and God will give victory"' These, reportedly Joan of Arc's last words, were those that were to appear all too soon on banners draped on Emily Davison's grave.



(<http://womanandhersphere.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/kitty-marion.jpg>)

Kitty Marion

Another suffragette who places herself with Emily Davison at the Fair was Kitty Marion, music hall artiste and militant suffragette. In her unpublished autobiography she states that, with Emily Davison, she was among a group of friends who discussed the possibility of making a protest the next day at Epsom. As she remembered it nothing was decided but. 'Before we parted that night, Emily gave me a tiny green chamois purse containing a sovereign for "'munitions I might need soon"'. We have only Kitty Marion's word that Emily Davison made this cryptic comment to which, of course, she then gives her own interpretation; I shall publish a post in a few days time recounting What Kitty Did Next. Did Emily Davison, who we know was by no means well off and with no employment, on the evening before the Derby really give away the large sum of a sovereign (£1 then, worth about £65 today). It doesn't seem very likely, but, if she did, what could she have meant by it?

For, although Emily Davison is not known to have undertaken any militant acts since the end of 1912, Kitty Marion most certainly had. While standing talking on 3 June at the 'All in a Garden Fair', it was with the knowledge that in the course of the previous few weeks she she had been responsible for setting fire to at least three houses – the latest, from the evidence of her scrapbook, being a house in Folkestone on 17 May. One of these houses, severely damaged on 15 April, was 'Levetleigh', the Hastings home of an MP. In addition she had set fire to a succession of stationary railway carriages in places such as Teddington, around London's outer suburbs.

So, as the women stood together 'under the Italian sky', at least one of them had, metaphorically and, probably, literally, traces of paraffin on her hands. It is difficult to believe that Emily Davison was not aware of the arsonists in her circle and that for all the the 'beautiful rose garden' that surrounded them and the girls in virginal white standing outside the Empress Rooms inviting passers-by to step in, the atmosphere within the group was not increasingly febrile. For reasons that I will put forward in tomorrow's post, I think it was in the course of this evening – and not before – that Emily Davison made up her mind to take the train the next day to Epsom – and the Derby.

Emily Wilding Davison , militancy , suffragettes , WSPU

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