



## The death of suffragette Emily Wilding Davison: The Manchester Guardian's response

How the paper reported on the death of the militant suffragist - and the reaction of its readers



Emily Davison a few days before her fatal attempt to stop the King's horse 'Amner' on Derby Day to draw attention to the Women's Suffragette movement. Photograph: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Emily Wilding Davison, the militant suffragist who stepped out in front of the King's horse on 4 June 1913, died from her injuries four days later. The Manchester Guardian reported the death and printed an editorial that acknowledged her courage and resolution but noted that because of her actions "In effect, though not in intention, she has committed suicide to keep women voteless and "militancy" prominent.

...ing to employ es-  
as (just as it is to-day  
k nurses). The guild  
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### A Horrible Responsibility.

THE death of Miss DAVISON, the suffragist who threw herself in front of a horse in the Derby, is hideous in its tragic futility. No one, at any rate no one who has ever let a runaway horse pass him in the street, can dare to say that her act was not one of high courage and resolution. But all this moral force and physical daring was not merely poured out to waste. It was spent on the immediate baseness of endangering the life of a stranger, a fellow-creature inoffensively going about the work of his own trade. And it was spent, too, on sinking into odium and disrepute the very cause which this unhappy lady had wished to serve. Had she spent the hour within which the Derby was run in making a suffrago speech at a street corner in a London alium she would have been alive now and

transcontinental trade

### Lord Rendel's Ins,

A correspondent wri  
suggested to the lato  
Rendel's first address  
Montgomeryshire was  
Methodist ministers ce  
was untrue. But tho  
Rendel had contrived  
nationalism unaided  
Lord Rendel's sympat  
Welsh mind and char  
to his friendship witl  
Humphreys-Owen, f  
quire, who succeeded  
They became insepar  
through Mr. Humph  
through any other me  
gained that inner ac  
Welsh point of view  
speeches and writings.  
had retired Lord Ren  
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and when it was abo  
he was leaving for a

The Manchester

Guardian, 11 June 1913. Click on image to read full article.

In response, the paper received a vast number of letters including one from the suffragist, and regular Guardian contributor, Evelyn Sharp (see below).

*To the Editor of the Manchester Guardian.*

Sir,—I do not wish to take up your valuable space in discussing the ethics of Miss Davison's sacrifice, for posterity is the only unbiased judge of those who make the supreme gift of a life for a cause. But I ask you to allow me to utter a protest against the extraordinarily narrow assumption in your leading article to-day that the responsibility for her action lies upon the shoulders of the leaders of the militant movement, that is, if you are referring to these women, as I assume you are, in your allusion to attractive personalities. I should have thought that the presence of death might have made it possible for once to get some sort of a vision of the immeasurably wider issues involved.

The Manchester Guardian, 11 June 1913

To this, CP Scott, the paper's editor, added an editorial footnote (something he often did), reiterating the point that "militancy" was an obstacle to women's suffrage. More letters appeared on the 12 June.

Emily Wilding Davison herself had written to the paper in December 1911 (see below), declaring that "No deserving cause could succeed by violence. The success of violence is the test of righteousness of the cause." Scott's footnote to this letter read:

The really ludicrous position is the Mr Lloyd George is fighting to enfranchise seven million women and the militants are smashing unoffending people's windows and breaking up benevolent societies' meetings in a desperate effort to prevent him.

d lightly enter upon a war  
with all the tremendous losses  
incurred by both nations and  
civilisation, but let our states-  
men, and writers also respect-  
fully remind Germany that her  
do their part, and that such  
ons of hostility towards this  
indulged in by the Crown  
ply resented by peace-lov-  
and make more difficult  
aining wild jingoes who are  
flaunt the flag of England to  
of our interests. In our sin-  
s friendly with Germany we  
loyal to our own Empire or  
the proved statesmen whom  
chosen for our Ministers.—  
ALFRED GOODERE.  
ad, Derby, November 29.

ght must, of course, be given  
ter and antecedents of our  
it if a vicious and anti-Liberal  
be challenged because some  
en whom we have good reason  
ds to respect have made them-  
sle for it, Liberalism will soon  
ay. Powerful politicians are  
, of all others, need the check  
ndent public opinion.—Ed.

## WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND THE GOVERNMENT. MILITANT METHODS.

To the Editor of the Manchester Guardian.

Sir,—In your comment on Miss Christabel Pankhurst's straightforward letter on militancy you say: "Miss Pankhurst is certainly now definite enough and wrong enough. She cannot achieve what she proposes by the means she designs, and she ought not to." Will you allow me to say to this, "Wait and see"? All English history gives the contradiction to your assertion. In our history we read of many deeds of violence done to win reform. The whole Civil War was such an example. But the blame for the violence lies not on those who do it, but on those who drive the agitators to such extremes. The truth of this is proved by the famous scene between Mr. Beales and Mr. Walpole, the Home Secretary, on the day

we are asked to endure or to r  
situtional methods.

The women may have made a  
garding themselves as such slave  
have simply displayed womanly  
heroism—posterity will judge at  
tell,—but the ethics of their car-  
mission to the injustice and insu-  
lawry would, at this particula  
threatened manhood suffrage and  
"corpedoed" Conciliation Bill,  
blow to society at large, which  
majority of women, than the com-  
breaches of the law in which t  
more pain than they inflict and v  
seriously disturbed the law-abid  
the people.—Yours, &c.,

J. M. LA  
Nottingham, November 29.

[It is not a question at all of th  
of insurrection, but of a prepos-  
tion of it. Besides, it is not as  
it is an attempt of a relatively v  
of suffragists to dictate to all of  
as well as to the Government :  
the precise solution of the suf-  
and not only the solution by  
which it is to be brought about  
fact that they are alone in their  
solution is, we believe, impos-  
mands womanhood suffrage is

The Manchester

Guardian, 1 December 1911

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