

MITCHELL, LILLIAS TAIT

1884-1940

Lillias Mitchell, suffragette campaigner, was born in Leith into a prosperous family. She joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in late 1907/early 1908 after attending a suffrage meeting in Edinburgh at which Emmeline Pankhurst was a speaker. From then on, her life revolved around the suffrage cause: 'I lived and moved and seemed to have my being in working for votes for women'.

In 1911, she was appointed WSPU organiser in Aberdeen and, in March 1912, took part in a window-smashing raid in London, for which she was arrested. The policeman who arrested her cheered her, remarking that many men had had to do much the same in order to get the vote! For her part in the raid, she was sentenced to four months in Holloway prison, where she went on hunger strike and was forcibly fed. After her release, she returned to Aberdeen and continued to organise and take part in militant protests, including painting the marker flags on Balmoral golf course in WSPU colours, with messages attached about the forcible feeding of suffragettes and 'Votes for Women'. As the Royal family was in residence at Balmoral at the time, this caused a great commotion in the London press. With a companion, she also confronted the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, on the Dornoch golf course, but no charges were brought.

Lillias Mitchell was considered to be 'a model WSPU organiser' and was sent to Birmingham to organise militant protests in the Midlands, including setting railway stations on fire in the city and an attack on the Castle Bromwich racecourse. She was charged with making inciting speeches and sent to Winson Green Prison, where she became ill after going on hunger strike. Soon after her release, she was re-arrested under the 'Cat and Mouse' Act.

After the First World War, Lillias Mitchell joined the Edinburgh Women Citizens' Association, wrote for *The Scotsman* newspaper, and was secretary to the Edinburgh and South Area of the YWCA.

