

Putting Danehill on the Map Cicely Corbett Fisher 1885-1959

Frances Stenlake November 2020

Cicely Corbett was the younger daughter of suffrage campaigners Marie and Charles Corbett, of Woodgate, Danehill, Sussex, and sister of Margery Corbett Ashby. She became a practised stage performer through contributing songs to concerts at the Congregational Hall, built by veteran suffragist Louisa Martindale, in nearby Horsted Keynes.

After graduating from Somerville College, Oxford, in 1907, and as secretary of her mother's Forward Suffrage Union in the Women's Liberal Association (WLA), Cicely became much in demand as a speaker all over the country, both to explain the Forward Suffrage Union to WLA branches and to talk on behalf of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). In 1909 she took the stage in Cardiff while friend Helga Gill, a Norwegian suffragist, was spending a month as NUWSS organiser there, and joined in the NUWSS Scottish Highlands Campaign, chairing a meeting at Kingussie. In Sussex that year she spoke to the Haywards Heath and Lindfield Women Liberals Association and to the Brighton and Hove Women's Franchise Society.

Cicely participated in Men's League for Women's Suffrage (MLWS) rallies in Trafalgar Square and was regularly paired with a MLWS speaker, for example Laurence Housman, to speak at open-air meetings throughout Greater London. In 1909 the International Women's Franchise Club was formed, under the auspices of the MLWS, with Cicely its 'indefatigable' secretary.

Cicely also spoke in company with Millicent Garrett Fawcett, on one occasion singing the suffrage version of Hope and Glory. Speaking tours took her to Ireland in 1911 and again, with Helga Gill, in 1912. Having first gone to Hungary in 1910 to help organise suffrage groups there, she returned, as the recently-married Cecily Corbett Fisher, for the IWSA Congress in Budapest in June 1913 where, as 'a great favourite', she drew huge audiences.

In London, Cicely was a member of the executive committee of the East St Pancras NUWSS, and on the general committee of the Actresses' Franchise League. She did

not neglect Sussex, however, speaking at meetings at Arundel, the tiny village of Slaugham, Rotherfield, and Uckfield, as well as at Horsted Keynes and Danehill. Reflecting the Corbett family's commitment to disarmament, Cicely reported on the first Peace Study Conference, in Amsterdam, held following the decision taken at the 1926 Conference of the International Alliance for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship to study 'Peace questions'. She departed from family tradition in becoming 'an ardent supporter of the Labour movement': in November 1928, as secretary of the Advisory Committee on Finance and Commerce for the National Labour Party, she addressed a Cuckfield Labour Party meeting in the Queen's Hall on 'Disarmament and Peace'. In September 1933, at an East Grinstead Labour Party Fete and Rally in Elm Hall garden, she chaired a talk by 'Manny' Shinwell.



Above: Marie and Charles
Below: Cicely

