

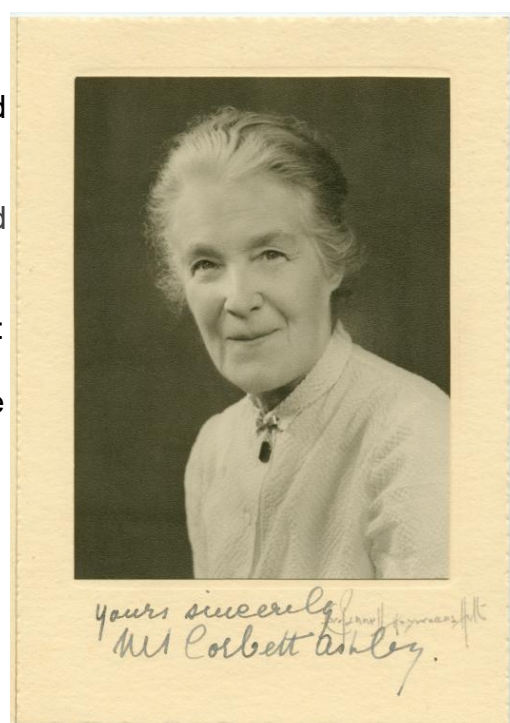
Dame Margery Corbett Ashby 1882- 1981

Frances Stenlake November 2020

Margery Corbett Ashby was the elder daughter of leading Liberal suffrage campaigners Marie and Charles Corbett of Woodgate, Danehill, Sussex. In 1904 she and sister Cicely accompanied Marie to Berlin for the first International Women's Suffrage Congress. With a BA from Newnham, Cambridge, Margery became secretary of the National Union Of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), then joined the executive committee and was soon addressing public meetings in London and in Sussex: at Brighton Dome in October 1910 she was the principal speaker at the biggest event yet organised by the Brighton and Hove Women's Franchise Society. While their father was briefly Liberal MP for East Grinstead and had a flat in London, she and Cicely formed the 'Younger Suffragists' there. This non-party, non-militant society's inaugural meeting in December 1909 was chaired by Margery and addressed by Lady Betty Balfour of the Conservative Women's Franchise Society.



County Liberals and eminent suffrage campaigners gathered for Margery's wedding to Brian Ashby in Danehill Church in December 1910. Although the couple lived in Putney, Margery becoming a Poor Law Guardian in Wandsworth and chair of the Barnes, Mortlake and East Sheen branch of the London Society for Women's Suffrage, she continued to speak for women's suffrage in Danehill as well as in London: at a 'drawing room' meeting hosted by Mrs Firebrace of Danehurst in November 1912, and on a platform at the Hyde Park mass rally at the culmination of the Great Suffrage Pilgrimage in July 1913.



When 1918 Representation of the People Act allowed women to stand for Parliament, Margery stood for the Liberals at several General Elections just to further the cause. At Ladywood, Birmingham, in December 1918, she was, as the sympathetic *Mid Sussex Times* reported, 'snowed under' by votes for Neville Chamberlain who then entered the House of Commons for the first time. Three years later she 'made a splendid fight for Liberalism at Richmond', supported by fellow Sussex Liberal, Lord Denman of Balcombe Place.

The *Mid Sussex Times* took pride in announcing the achievements of 'Charles Corbett's clever daughter' (sic), repeatedly reminding readers of her election in 1923 as President of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, and in 1927 as President of the Women's National Liberal Federation. In 1929, as President of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, the successor to the NUWSS, Margery attended a meeting at Balcombe Place to promote the formation of Townswomen's Guilds in Sussex. Women having been granted equal voting rights with men in 1928, the NUSEC was, in 1933, succeeded by the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds, with Margery as President.

As a member of the British delegation to the disappointing 1932-4 League of Nations World Disarmament Conference in Geneva, Margery worked with Lord Robert Cecil, of nearby Chelwood Gate, a founder member, with her father, of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage in 1907. In February 1935 these two luminaries of the women's rights and peace movements emphasized to a packed audience in Danehill Memorial Hall the need to persevere with League of Nations peace efforts. Margery referring to having worked in 30 countries, spoke of 'the feeling of the world for peace'. 'It is our business to let the Government know what we want.'

Portrait photograph two of Margery Corbett Ashby by Haywards Heath photographer Eva Pannell, Schwimmer/Lloyd Collection, New York Public Library

Sources:

Common Cause

Mid Sussex Times

Brighton Gazette

Danehill Parish Historical Society *Woodgate* July 2010

LSE Women's Library: Margery Corbett Ashby reminiscences recorded by J Bakewell 1972