

Marie Corbett 1859-1932 Resident of Danehill

Frances Stenlake, November 2020

Leading Liberals Marie and Charles Corbett lived at Woodgate, (now *Cumnor School*) his estate at Danehill, near East Grinstead. When the 1894 Local Government Act gave propertied women the right to vote for and serve on local councils and as Poor Law Guardians, Marie became the first woman member of the new Uckfield Rural District Council and a Guardian of Uckfield Workhouse

In 1887, with Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Eva McLaren and Lady Frances Balfour to she formed the Liberal Women's Suffrage Society, and in 1907 she co-founded the Forward Suffrage Union to urge the Federation of Women Liberals Associations to adopt a definite women's suffrage policy. In 1911, following a meeting held by Lady Edith Fox-Pitt and Lady Queensberry, presided over by Lady Grove, chair of the Forward Suffrage Union, and addressed by Frances Balfour, Marie formed the East Grinstead Women's Suffrage Society with herself as honorary secretary. Its President was Muriel, Countess de la Warr, and titled Vice-Presidents were: Muriel's sister-in-law Countess Sybil Brassey; Lady Fox-Pitt; Lady Eleanor Cecil of Chelwood Gate, whose husband, Lord Robert Cecil, was a founder member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage (MLWS); Countess Munster of Maresfield Park; Countess Platen; and Lady Katherine Morgan of the Conservative Women's Franchise Association.

A few months later Florence Buckley, East Grinstead Women's Suffrage Society (EGWSS) treasurer, chaired the first women's suffrage meeting ever to be held in Danehill itself. Miss Chute Ellis and Miss Spooner, of the Central Sussex Women's Suffrage Society, addressed an audience of 50-60, enlisting 12 new members. Cicely Corbett proposed the vote of thanks.

In 1912 the EGWSS became affiliated to the Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire Federation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). With the escalation of Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) violence that year, Marie, with other Sussex branch secretaries, wrote to the local press, denouncing WSPU militancy: 'There cannot be more than a few hundred who have put themselves under the leadership of the WSPU for the commission of lawless activities. The members of the East Grinstead Women's Suffrage Society strongly disapprove of acts of violence.'

In July 1913 Marie arranged a public meeting on the eve of taking EGWSS members to join the Brighton Road contingent of Great Suffrage Pilgrimage to London. This descended into the 'East Grinstead Riot' when youths, recruited by 'anti' agents provocateurs, subjected EGWSS members and speakers, including Laurence Housman, a founder member of the MLWS, to noisy verbal abuse and unsavoury and injurious missiles. Undaunted, about 20 women set off the following morning to join the Brighton Road and Horsham contingents on their way from Crawley to Horley.

From 1904 when Marie and her two daughters, Margery and Cicely, attended the first International Suffrage Congress, in Berlin, until 1921 when she took 'a large contingent of women from Danehill' to participate in the women's procession from the Embankment to the Albert Hall World Disarmament Conference, Marie campaigned on behalf of women at international as well as local level. Her obituary in the *Mid Sussex Times* detailed her involvement in community activity; *International Women's Suffrage News* eulogised her as 'one of our pioneers'.



Mrs Marie Corbett with, perhaps, one of her daughters, Cicely or Margery.



Uckfield Workhouse, now demolished