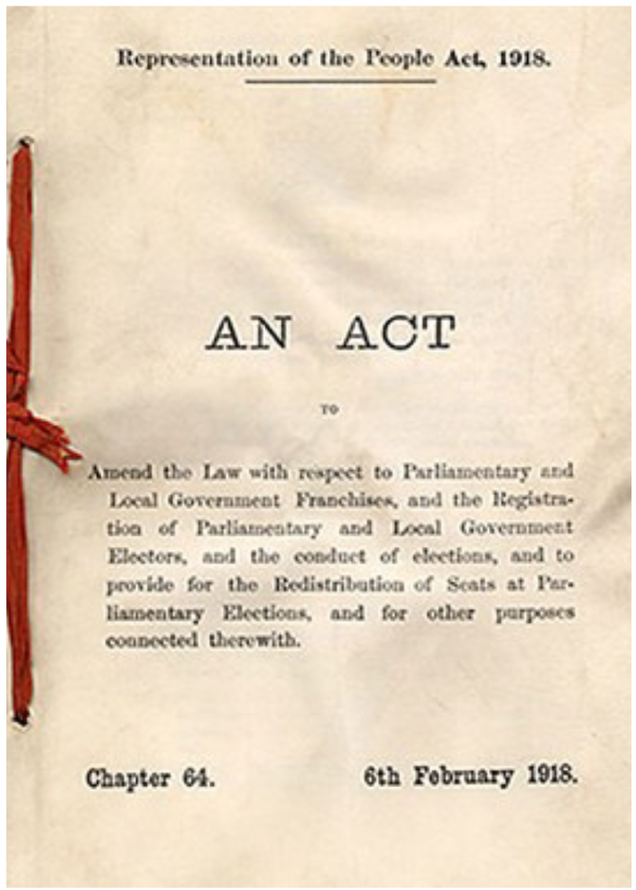
DUNOON AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

WHAT WAS THE CAMPAIGN FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE?

The campaign for women's suffrage began in the second half of the nineteenth century and was fought to allow women the right to vote in British Parliamentary elections. "Suffragists" was the title given to those who campaigned peacefully throughout the earlier days of the movement, and "suffragettes" was given to those who used direct and non-peaceful ways known as "militant action." There were two Acts passed through Parliament in the early twentieth century which gave women the right to vote. These were known as the Representation of the People Acts. The first in 1918 allowed only some women to vote, those over the age of thirty who either owned their own property or were married to a property owner. This Act also allowed all men over the age of twenty-one to vote, without the need to own property. Ten years later, the 1928 Act allowed all women over the age of twenty-one to vote.

WHY WAS DUNOON IMPORTANT?

Dunoon became an important centre for the suffragette campaign throughout the early 1900s. Throughout the summer months, a suffrage organisation called The Women's Freedom League (WFL) used Dunoon as a base for their West of Scotland campaign. The earliest example of this is from May 1908, where WFL organiser Anna Munro was looking for "volunteers, speakers and workers" to assist her in Dunoon that July and August. Dunoon was chosen as a base due to its easy connection with the surrounding towns of the west coast, and it was reported that from Dunoon "a steady flow of speakers and helpers had carried women's suffrage propaganda into all the Clyde watering places." These campaigns continued throughout the century. There were fifty-five meetings held for the Clyde campaign throughout July 1913 in Dunoon and the surrounding areas, such as Rothesay, Kirn, Millport and Largs.



Representation of the People Act, 1918.

AN ACT

TO

Amend the Law with respect to Parliamentary and Local Government Franchises, and the Registration of Parliamentary and Local Government Electors, and the conduct of elections, and to provide for the Redistribution of Seats at Parliamentary Elections, and for other purposes connected therewith.

Chapter 64. 6th February 1918.

("Representation of the People Act 1918" by UK Parliament is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

WHAT AREAS OF DUNOON WERE USED BY THE CAMPAIGNERS?

The Castle Hill which lies opposite this museum was an important site for the suffragettes and became a part of their campaign. It was reported in the newspapers that the campaign of 1908 was formally closed by a "magnificent meeting" on Castle Hill, complete with speakers and an audience. At one Castle Hill gathering in July 1914, a suffragette speaker was attacked by the disagreeing crowd, with lumps of grass and stones thrown at her and the other speakers. They were then chased down the hill, and the police had to protect them from being thrown into the Clyde by locking them in the West Bay's open-air shelter.

The WFL also used to hold public meetings in Dunoon's Burgh Hall, which can still be found on Argyll Street. In 1908, the WFL held a meeting where they discussed the importance of women having the right to vote. Speaking at the meeting, famous suffragette Mary Molony urged the audience to all send postcards to the Prime Minister at the time, Herbert Henry Asquith, and ask him to give women the vote. It was reported that the meeting closed with a "resolution calling upon the Government to do justice to the women of the country," by allowing them to vote. The meeting was successful as there were new members added to the WFL's local branch by the end.

CULTURE, HERITAGE & ARTS ASSEMBLY. ARGYLL & ISLES
Foundation SCOTTISHPOWER
ABMHF ARGYLL & BUTE MUSEUMS & HERITAGE FORUM

DUNOON AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Dunoon has also been called home by several suffragettes who played a part in campaigning for votes for women. Both Arabella Scott and Helen Crawfurd Anderson were members of the Women's Social and Political Union. (WSPU) This was set up in 1903 to campaign for votes for women and was known for using direct and non-peaceful 'militant action' to draw attention to their cause.

ARABELLA SCOTT, along with her sister Muriel, were well-known in the Scottish suffrage movement for their use of militant action. Arabella was initially sent to Calton prison along with two other suffragettes for trying to set fire to Kelso racecourse on the 19th of May 1913. Scott was released after five days due to the 1913 Prisoners Act, also known as the Cat and Mouse Act. This allowed those hunger striking to be released for medical reasons, and to be rearrested and taken back into jail when their condition improved. Scott was in and out of prison for several years due to her continued hunger strike, and commonly resisted her rearrests. After being taken into Perth prison in June 1913 and forcibly fed for around a month, she was released on the 26th of July. She stated that the experience made her "more militant than ever."

Image of Arabella Scott (1886-1980), Scottish suffragette.
© Anna Burnside / Daily Record

"At night, my sleep was often very much broken and disturbed by dreams. The fact of knowing I had so many friends near . . . gave me courage to go through with the ordeal." –
Arabella Scott's Autobiography, 'My Murky Past'

SUFFRAGETTE FACT FILE:

Name: Arabella Charlotte Scott

Date and Place of Birth: 7th May 1886, Dunoon

Suffrage Organisation: Women's Social and Political Union

Known For: Using militant action, her hunger strike whilst in jail, and the length of time she was force fed for.

Legacy: Commonly included in Scottish histories of the suffragette movement due to her treatment in jail. A fictional retelling of her life has been written by playwright Ajay Close, titled 'A Petrol Scented Spring.'

DUNOON AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

HELEN CRAWFURD ANDERSON was inspired to join the movement whilst on holiday in nearby Rothesay, after she heard suffragette Helen Fraser's speech there in 1908. She joined the WSPU in 1910. The WSPU ran a window breaking campaign in 1912, and Crawfurd was sentenced to a month in Holloway jail after smashing the Minister for Education's window.

She also worked as part of a bodyguard which aimed to protect WSPU leader Emmeline Pankhurst whilst Pankhurst attended a meeting in Glasgow. She was sentenced to ten days in jail after breaking two windows to protest Pankhurst's arrest. She went on hunger strike and was released due to the Cat and Mouse Act. She had a further stay in jail in July 1914, for refusing to report back to serve the rest of her earlier sentence. She left the WSPU at the outbreak of the First World War as she did not support Pankhurst's pro-war opinions.

Crawfurd instead became involved with the left-wing Independent Labour Party (ILP) and was also the Secretary of the Glasgow Women's Housing Association. In 1915, she organised rent strikes in Glasgow to protest price rises being put in place by landlords. The following year, she founded the anti-war movement of the Women's Peace Crusade alongside activists Agnes Dollan and Mary Barbour. This grew to have local branches throughout Britain. She later left the ILP and stood as a Communist Party candidate for Govan, an area of Glasgow, in November 1921. Although unsuccessful, her manifesto centred the importance of equal rights for women. Crawfurd arrived in Dunoon at the end of the Second World War and became the town's first female councillor aged sixty-eight. She worked in this role for two years.

'I always took a lead in things. [...] When I believed a thing was right, I wanted to bring other people to see it my way.' –
Helen Crawfurd's Untitled Autobiography.

Glasgow Municipal Election, 1st Nov., 1921.

30th (GOVAN) WARD.

HELEN CRAWFURD

Communist Candidate.

COMMITTEE ROOMS - - - 55 QUEEN STREET, GOVAN.

Election manifesto of Helen Crawfurd, Communist Candidate for the Govan Ward, Glasgow Municipal Election, 1921. © Gallacher Memorial Library - Glasgow Caledonian University Library/ SCRAN. Crown copyright, National Records of Scotland, [HH16/45].

SUFFRAGETTE FACT FILE:

Name: Helen Crawfurd Anderson

Date and Place of Birth: 9th November 1877, in theGorbals area of Glasgow

Suffrage Organisation: Women's Social and Political Union (until 1914)

Known For: Her militant actions, her involvement in organising Glasgow rent strikes and the starting the anti-war Women's Peace Crusade during the First World War. She broke new ground as Dunoon's first female councillor.

Legacy: Well-known for her role in the Scottish suffrage movement, and her political life which always placed the importance of equality at its centre.

CULTURE, HERITAGE & ARTS ASSEMBLY. ARGYLL & ISLES
Foundation SCOTTISHPOWER
ABMHF ARGYLL & BUTE MUSEUMS & HERITAGE FORUM