

Rowena Edlin- White of The Nottingham Women's History Group spoke to us in April about The Suffragettes in Nottingham.

Nottingham since the days of Chartism and the Reform Laws has had a reputation for promoting political democracy. It is not surprising that the women's suffrage campaign which began in the late 1800s should find ready support in the area. It was a continuation of earlier movements calling for improved education, welfare and women's working conditions. Many of the leading women were wives or daughters of professional men or factory owners. Some were connected to religious groups.

Rowena gave us examples of women whose activities were an embarrassment to their husbands or put family businesses at risk. Alice Dax was married to a chemist and oculist in Eastwood. Alice spoke her mind, loudly, and did not care what people thought. Trade at the chemist's shop dropped off and it was forced to sell and move elsewhere. It is said D.H.Lawrence based Clara Dawes in "Sons and Lovers" on Alice Dax. Rowena told us about Elsie Howey, the daughter of a Rector. What was the reaction of the parishioners when Elsie was frequently arrested and imprisoned?

Suffragettes came from all classes of society. Lady Laura Ridding was the daughter of the First Earl of Shelbourne and married George Ridding who became the first Bishop of Southwell. She is known to have improved conditions for many local women and after her husband's death she was a Patron of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

All these women and many more in Nottingham risked mockery, imprisonment, force-feeding and other degradations before, in 1918, the Representation of the People Act allowed some women over the age of thirty to vote for the first time. It was A START.

Our speaker was thanked for a stimulating and thought provoking evening.