HERStory: Making Invisible Women Visible

Research notes

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| Group Number and Researcher Name: Team 3, Anna Curran and Sophie Marshall | |
| Name of Research Focus: Edith Harriet Milner | |
| Date of Birth: 30 April 1845 | Date of Death: Spring 1921 (Age 76) |
| Main Reason to Research: Re-Humanising a female member of the Anti-Suffrage Movement | |
| Are there any other connections to key geographical locations or people? **United Kingdom: Nun Appleton Hall, York, London**  **Sir William Milner 1st Baronet, Sir William Mordaunt Milner 6th Baronet** | |
| Key Words: Female Anti-Suffrage, Philanthropy, Primrose League, WNASL, Conservatism, Female Participation in Local Politics | |
| **What have you found out?** | |
| *[Summary of your research]*   * Edith Milner was born in Appleton, Bolton Percy (Selby) in 1845, living with her extended family at Nun Appleton Hall. The estate had been purchased by her great-grandfather, Alderman William Milner of Leeds in 1711.[[1]](#footnote-0) * After her grandfather’s death in 1881, she briefly moved to London and resided at 60 Princes Gate, St George Hanover Square, London. She then moved back to Yorkshire, living at The Cottage, Heworth Green, York in the 1891 census. She remained in York at Heworth Moor House until her death in 1921. * Edith never married and lived as a lady of independent means on her own personal income, participating in a number of philanthropic endeavours during her time in York. * From 1879, Edith had been on the Executive Committee of the York Charity Organisation Society.[[2]](#footnote-1) The Society had been an extension of an Anti-Mendicity Society and had the intention of raising money to improve the lives of the city’s poor. Edith had been a member of the Society for some time, organising a York Charity Organisation Concert in 1891. * As president of the York Factory Girls’ Club in 1883, Edith provided books, mittens and meals to ‘deserving factory girls’ that came under the Factory Act.[[3]](#footnote-2) She had also been involved in the opening of the York Boys’ Industrial School in 1888, which sought to provide care and training to destitute children within the city.[[4]](#footnote-3) * Between 1899 and 1914, Milner was a prominent figure in local politics as a ‘Ruling Councillor’ of the ‘Primrose League’, an organisation which was founded in 1883 and aimed to spread conservative principles in Britain, such as free enterprise and imperial power.[[5]](#footnote-4) In 1887, the York Herald reported that Milner spoke at a League meeting in which she advocated for the formation of habitations in every polling district, ultimately leading to Milner founding the “Milner Habitation”.[[6]](#footnote-5) * Additionally, Edith Milner was a prominent anti-suffragist and member of the Women’s National Anti-Suffrage League (WNASL), an organisation that condemned female participation in politics as unnatural and incompatible with femininity.[[7]](#footnote-6) * We are able to recover Milner’s own political voice and perspective through the letters she wrote to local newspapers. For example, in an 1899 edition of the Yorkshire Gazette she described herself as “antagonistic to women’s suffrage, on social, moral, and political grounds”.[[8]](#footnote-7) | |
| Why is this interesting and what impact have they had? | |
| *[What is it about their life that is interesting to you]*   * The York suffrage movement has been quite well documented in the city, taking shape in the form of a community play and research undertaken by the York Castle Museum. When we think of the opposition to the movement, often think of misogynistic men. However, it would be interesting to challenge our collective memory by acknowledging the role of seemingly ‘unfeminist’ female anti-suffrage activists. * As a wealthy, powerful and independent woman, Edith could be considered a prime candidate for the Suffrage Movement. However, Edith’s involvement with the York WNASL is insightful in showing how anti-suffrage is not necessarily connected to anti-feminism. * Additionally, Milner encapsulates the inherent tension within the anti-suffrage movement. As Bush asserts there is an “implied contradiction between women’s public campaigning for anti-suffrage and their advocacy of a quieter, more domestic role for women”.[[9]](#footnote-8) | |
| Are there opportunities for follow up research? | |
| *[If you had more time or resources, where would you go to next]*   * Further research into the Milner family and how Edith had been able to use her family wealth to support her philanthropic endeavours * Find more out about her charitable work * Find out more about the activities organised by the WNASL * Gain access to minutes of WNASL meetings * Find out more about her involvement in and interactions with the Anti-Suffrage Movement in York | |
| **In your research have you discovered any connection to the Castle Museum collections/sites** | |
| *[Key collections/buildings or items held by YMT to support the research ]*  YORCM: 1946.7 Poster  YORCM: 1962.141 Pen  YORCM: AA3561 Primrose League Badge  YORAG: R1896 Sir William Mordaunt Milner Barrister  YORCM: DA9091 The York Herald | |

1. Find My Past. “Edith Milner in 1851”, *Find My Past,* accessed June 19th, 2021, <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBC/1851/0015298769&expand=true> . [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. *York Herald*. “York Charity Organisation and Anti-medicity Society.” Editorial. Jan. 19, 1880, 7. <https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=8&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=6&docId=GALE%7CR3211206785&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZBLD-MOD1&prodId=BNCN&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CR3211206785&searchId=R2&userGroupName=uniyork&inPS=true> . [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. *York Herald*. “York Factory Girls’ Club.” Editorial. Jan. 27, 1883, 12. <https://go-gale-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=23&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=4&docId=GALE%7CR3211234066&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZBLD-MOD1&prodId=BNCN&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CR3211234066&searchId=R1&userGroupName=uniyork&inPS=true> . [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. *York Herald*. “York Boys’ Industrial School.” Editorial. July 7, 1888, 6. <https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=87&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=14&docId=GALE%7CR3211310481&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZBLD-MOD1&prodId=BNCN&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CR3211310481&searchId=R1&userGroupName=uniyork&inPS=true> . [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. *York Herald*. “Social Record.” Editorial. Jan. 7, 1914, 3. <https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=11&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=11&docId=GALE%7CGW3225923393&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZBLE-MOD1&prodId=BNCN&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CGW3225923393&searchId=R1&userGroupName=uniyork&inPS=true> .

   Cooke, Alistair. “Founders of the Primrose League”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 19 May 2011. Accessed June 19, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/42172> . [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. *York Herald*. “The Primrose League.” Editorial. May 14, 1887, 10. <https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=11&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=3&docId=GALE%7CR3211296563&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZBLD-MOD1&prodId=BNCN&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CR3211296563&searchId=R1&userGroupName=uniyork&inPS=true> . [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Bush, Julia. “The Anti-Suffrage Movement”, *British Library.* March 5, 2018. Accessed June 19th, 2021. <https://www.bl.uk/votes-for-women/articles/the-anti-suffrage-movement#> . [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Waters, Michael. “The Women’s Suffrage Campaign in York”. October 30, 2018. Accessed June 19th, 2021. <https://ffhyork.weebly.com/uploads/8/2/0/5/8205739/the_womens_suffrage_campaign_in_york_-_a_talk_by_mike_waters_fo_ffh_on_30-10-18.pdf> . [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Bush, Julia. “The Anti-Suffrage Movement”. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)