

From Suffrage to Citizenship: The Cardiff and District Women Citizens
Association in comparative perspective 1921-1939

The interwar era marked a new stage in women's participation in public life. The suffrage movement which had campaigned for over sixty years for votes for women achieved some success with the Passing of the Representation of the People Act in 1918. In light of this, new and refocused organisations of women voters were formed and this included Women Citizen Associations (WCAs). These non-party organisations sought to empower and enhance women's status as citizens by campaigning for equal rights in the workplace, equal franchise, through educating women in citizenship and on an array of other issues which would improve the socio-economic and political position of women.¹ An assessment of the campaigns and activities of the Cardiff and District Women Citizens Association (CDWCA) in comparative perspective with WCAs in other locations across Britain provides a fresh way in which to examine Welsh women's non-party political activism in the interwar period.

¹ Sue Innes, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship in the Interwar Period: the Edinburgh Women Citizens' Association', *Women's History Review*, 13, 4, 2004, p.625. I owe much of my thinking on this topic generally to conversations with the late Dr Innes and I am indebted to her for her advice and encouragement. I also wish to thank my colleagues at Manchester Metropolitan University, Mr Gervase Phillips and Dr Louise Willmot both of whom provided encouragement and advice. I would also like to thank the editors and reviewers of *Llafur* for their useful suggested additions to this piece.

In order to encourage enfranchised women to harness their newly won status as citizens and to ensure more women took an active interest in political matters, the National Women Citizens Association (1917-1975) was formed by Mrs. Ogilvie Gordon, President of the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW). Under her leadership a Provisional Central Committee on the Citizenship of Women was instigated and individuals from interested women's societies were recruited; by November of 1917 there were forty two affiliated groups. In December 1917, the first Central Committee members were elected and following a postal vote amongst women's organisations the proposed name of the National Women Citizens' Association (NWCA) was adopted; with Helena Normanton as the first secretary. At a local level, there were also autonomous branches of Women Citizens' Associations (WCAs), some of which had been formed before the national body, as in Manchester by Shena Simon and Liverpool by Eleanor Rathbone during 1913. The purpose of WCAs was to interest women in a range of political and social issues and to prepare them for active citizenship.²

The Representation of the People Act, passed in 1918, gave the vote to women over thirty years of age, who were either occupiers of property with an annual rent of £5 or were householders, wives of householders or graduates of British universities.³ It was at this point, having achieved a prime objective, many women activists realised that additional work was

² Women's Library, London, (hereafter WL) GB 106 5NWC History of the National Women Citizens' Association

needed to achieve equal citizenship. Many suffrage societies expanded their aims and changed their name to reflect the new political climate in which they were to operate; in 1919 the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) became the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC).⁴ In the same year, the Cardiff Women's Suffrage Society changed its name to the Cardiff and District Society for Equal Citizenship, and affiliated to the NUSEC; two years later in 1921 it became the Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Association (CDWCA).⁵ In other localities there were similar evolutionary changes; in Edinburgh the Women Citizens' Association was formed a month after the Parliamentary franchise had been granted,⁶ whilst in Cambridge the WCA was also inaugurated and the funds from the Women's Local Government sub-committee were passed to the new organisation.⁷ Women's participation in non-party politics in these locations developed therefore from pre-war

³ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, (Hampshire, 1992), p.34.

⁴ P. Gordon and D. Doughan (eds.), *Dictionary of British Women's Organisations*, p. 109.

⁵ Glamorgan County Record Office (hereafter G.C. R. O.), Minute Book of the Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Association, D/D/X158/2/1, March 1921.

⁶ National Archives of Scotland (hereafter N.A.S.), EWCA Minutes, Executive Committee and general meeting May 1918 - October 1919, GD333/7; Woman Citizen, April 1935, pp. 5-7.

suffrage organisations and in light of their role as newly enfranchised women citizens.⁸

The transition from pre to post war feminism was to some extent problematical for some women and certain organisations. In 1919, under the leadership of social reformer and feminist Eleanor Rathbone, the NUSEC adopted a new programme which proposed equal franchise at the age of twenty-one, and saw a shift in emphasis from equal rights, to issues which largely affected the lives of ordinary women including family allowances and the provision of birth control.⁹ The NUSEC ethos differed from that of the NUWSS in that they explicitly acknowledged and accepted different gender roles.¹⁰ Traditional feminists viewed this shift as a betrayal, believing it acted to perpetuate the idea of women's place in society primarily as wives and

7 Cambridge County Record Office (hereafter C.C.R.O.), *Cambridge National Council of Women: A survey of fifty years work*, R/84/91.

8 Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff (hereafter GA), GB0214 DX158, DX675/1, Cardiff Women Citizens Association Collection.

9 Harold L. Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage campaign 1866-1928*, (London: Pearson Education, 1998) p.93

10 Christine Collet 'Women and Politics, 1900-1939' in Chris Wrigley (ed), *A Companion to Twentieth Century Britain*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) pp. 123-124

mothers. This was one of the reasons why certain historians have suggested that the women's movement fragmented in different directions during the immediate post-war and interwar period.¹¹

That said, the picture is somewhat more complex, and this article suggests that in Wales the CDWCA like other branches across England and Scotland, was engaged in a variety of campaigns which crossed the 'equality' and 'difference' division throughout the interwar era.¹² To a certain extent women participating in WCAs were able to bridge potential differences and avoid splits in the membership, partly by being organised along non-party lines, and also by being united through the idea of women's citizenship. This was a gendered construction which united them as political actors and enabled them to bridge divergent interests, sustaining a broad range of campaigns and activities throughout and beyond the interwar era. Active citizenship was also significant and common to many WCAs; it was a status that

¹¹ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*

¹² The two sub-strands of feminism 'equality' and 'difference' relate principally to those who campaigned for women's rights on equal terms with men and argued that they should take part in the political decision-making process along with men; and 'difference' feminists those who sought to highlight women's difference in relation to men due to their child-bearing capacities. This is both complex and slightly misleading, as both groups wanted 'equality' but understood it differently. See, Karen Offen, 'Defining Feminism: a comparative historical approach' *Signs*, 14, 1988, pp. 136-138.

demanded practice. Women were encouraged to join WCAs, particularly those who had not been active in the pre-war suffrage movement. The intention was to educate women in citizenship who, in possession of the vote, could carve out a new role for women in public life, ultimately to ensure a better quality of life for all citizens. Citizenship was also a euphemism for feminism, being a less-confrontational way in which to justify women's opinions and participation in both local and national political arenas.¹³ How did women's activism in Cardiff develop?

The CDWCA was one of a myriad of Welsh women's organisations and in some respects its origins and membership lay in previous iterations of women's organisations. It was also able to develop into an effective organisation partly by being able to draw on the networks and connections amongst women active in South Welsh women's organisations. Throughout much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Welsh women had been active in an array of different organisations and campaigns before the formation of CDWCA.

At the turn of the twentieth century women, particularly those with

¹³ Early branches were formed by individuals. In 1917 when women were on the verge of being awarded the vote, the formation of branches across Britain was led by the National Union of Women Workers, later National Council of Women. Additional pre-war women's organisations, including women's suffrage societies and the Women's Local Government Society affiliated and reconstituted themselves into WCAs during the mid-nineteen twenties. WL, London, GB 106 5NWC National Women Citizens Association.

financial resources and time, had participated in a range of charitable activities. The University of Wales Settlement was a key place where women could debate the principles of equality and suffrage. It was here that Lilian and Mabel Howell spent much of their time, the former went to London to train as a social worker while the latter became secretary of the CDWSS holding the same position in the CDWCA from 1921.¹⁴ The arrival of mass party politics also provided an impetus for women's activism. Wales was a Liberal stronghold and local branches of the Women's Liberal Association and the Women's Liberal Union soon developed. By 1895 there were said to be 9,500 women in the Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Associations.¹⁵ There were also vibrant branches of the Primrose League (attached to the Conservative Party) although these never had the same depth of membership the Liberals could claim.¹⁶ Welsh women were also active in local branches of the Women's Labour League, and in 1912, some had joined the campaign for 'pit head baths' for miners, this became a national issue and

14 Kay Cook and Neil Evans, 'The Petty antic of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band'? The Women's suffrage Movement in Wales, 1890-1918 in Angela V John (Ed), *Our Mother's Land Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939* (Cardiff, 1991) p.163.

15 As above

16 As above

following the end of the First World War was championed by Elizabeth Andrews, the full time Labour Party organiser and Woman's Organiser for Wales.¹⁷ In South Wales working women, through branches of the Women's Cooperative Guild took an active interest in the politics of their local communities by campaigning on a range of issues such as the price, supply and quality of milk and thereby enhancing their economic status as consumers and co-operators.¹⁸ Branches of the South Wales Women's Co-operative Guild would, during the 1920s work collaboratively with the CDWCA on a number of campaigns including maternal mortality and women police. Women were also active in peace organisations. Katrina Gass has demonstrated how women, who had often been in suffrage organisations, chose in 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War to either become 'active patriots' or join to work for peace in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Some of these women, including Mrs Francis Wood, made an account of her experiences on the Peace Pilgrimage and gave a report to members of the CDWCA.¹⁹ Women in

17 Neil Evans and Dot Jones, 'A Blessing For The Miner's Wife': The Campaign For Pithead Baths in the South Wales Coalfields, 1908-1950', *Llafur*, 19, 1994, pp. 5-28.

18 Helen Thomas, 'A Democracy of Working Women': The Women's Co-operative Guild in South Wales, 1891-1939', *Llafur*, 2012

South Wales put their energies towards various organisations and campaigns. So what drove the formation of the CDWCA in 1921?

Most WCAs were formed from 1918 to 1930. The National WCA had, from its inception, encouraged women to set up and organise local branches across England, Scotland and Wales. The CDWCA grew directly out of the Cardiff and District Women's Suffrage Society (CDWSS) which had been formed in 1908; this later became the largest constitutional group outside of London.²⁰ Throughout the duration of the First World War, the CDWSS supported the war effort. Once hostilities ceased, and the partial franchise was achieved, they began to support a greater role for women in public life. At the December 1918 general election seventeen women stood for Parliament throughout Britain with one woman in Wales, the CDWSS vice president Millicent Mackenzie, who was unsuccessful as the Labour candidate for the university seat. This reflected how hard it was for women to break into the bastion of male dominated parliamentary politics.²¹ At a local

19 Katrina Gass, 'The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: Ninety Years of Working for Peace in Wales', *Llafur*, 3, 2006, pp. 29-44

20 Deirdre Beddoe, 'Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Wales', *the text of the eighteenth annual lecture of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales*, November, 2004, p.3.

21 Beddoe, 'Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Wales', pp.5-6, for other parts of Britain see,

level, the CDWSS also sought the election of women to urban district councils and as poor law guardians.²²

To encourage more women to take an interest in political issues and engage in public life and embrace their roles as new citizens, on the 7th March 1921, the CDWSS reconstituted itself to become the CDWCA.²³

Many prominent Cardiff suffragists became active members of the CDWCA, '25 per cent' of the first committee had held prominent positions in the constitutional suffrage movement.²⁴ Some of these women were school headmistresses, and were English-born such as Miss Mary Collin, who together with local Welsh women had lobbied politicians such as Lloyd George for votes for women. Others such as Mrs Henry Lewis, who was a leading local Conservative, had been

Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1987).

22 Ursula Masson, 'political conditions in wales are quite different...' party politics and votes for women in Wales 1912-15' *Women's History Review*, 9, 2, (2000), pp. 375-76.

23 GA, GB 0214 DX158/1/1, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Association Minute Book 1921.

24 GA, GB 0214 DX158/1/1, Cardiff and District Women's Suffrage Society Minute book 1919-1921

President of CDWSS from its inception in 1908, and took up the same post in the CDWCA in 1921.²⁵

There were continuities in the careers of women active in suffrage organisations who later played important roles in the formation or in the development in WCAs in other localities. The branches in Cambridge, Edinburgh, Manchester and Salford all had members who had been active in constitutional suffrage organisations.²⁶ Some appear to have been exceptional, such as the Edinburgh association which also had members who had been involved in militant suffrage activities, being members of the Women's Social and Political Union.²⁷ Suffrage activists across parts of Britain were therefore pivotal in shaping a renewed form of women's politics. This was created by the vote and was influenced by the ideas and ideals of women's citizenship which had been developed in the suffrage movement.

²⁵ Deirdre Beddoe, 'Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Wales', p.4.

²⁶ Joanne Smith, 'The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association: A study in women's citizenship 1913-1948', unpublished PhD thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University, (2007).

²⁷ Sue Innes, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship in the Interwar Period: the Edinburgh Women Citizens' Association', *Women's History Review*, 13, 4, (2004), p.625.

This is not to say that the development of WCAs were uniform in the ways in which they operated. Indeed they reveal some subtle differences. The CDWCA had four key objectives, these being:

to foster a sense of Citizenship amongst women; to encourage self education in civic, political and economic questions; to secure all adequate representation of the interest and efficiencies of women in the affairs of the community including the promotion of the election of women on to local governing bodies and to work for equality of opportunity and status for women with men.²⁸

WCAs in other localities such as in Edinburgh worked along similar lines, reflecting a broad national and local agenda. However, the WCA in Manchester and Salford had a purely municipal focus, certainly in its first ten years, and had no stated aim of seeking equality with men.²⁹ Most WCAs organised a variety of different campaigns over their lifetime. Yet some historians have suggested that the post-war women's movement witnessed a period of stagnation and decline.

²⁸ GA, GB 0214 DX158/2/1, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Association Minute Book 1921.

²⁹ Manchester Reference Library,(hereafter MRL), 305M4 Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association Annual Report 1914.

Innes has offered a different account. By defining the activities of the women's movement more widely and reflecting how women activists saw their own roles, the picture for WCAs is one of organisations being engaged in a diverse array of activities. This is also reflected in the records of the CDWCA.

From its inception the CDWCA engaged in a range of lobbying and campaigning which was extensive and included 'equality' issues such as the extension of the parliamentary franchise, equal pay, women police, birth control, divorce reform, and the removal of the marriage bar against women teachers. In addition, concerns related to maternity and child welfare, clean milk supply and distribution, increasing the age of marriage, cleaner streets, traffic calming methods, and the teaching of stammering children were addressed. The Representation of the People Act (Equal Franchise Act) 1928 which gave votes to women on the same terms as men at the age of twenty one, appear to have broadened the scope of the CDWCA activities to include: campaigns for reform of divorce legislation, to allow women entry in to the diplomatic and consular service on the same terms as men, and equal pay and conditions for women employed in Civil and Local Government Services.³⁰ The complexities of 'equality' and 'difference'

³⁰ GA, GB 0214 DX675/1, Newspaper Cutting 14th May 1930, DX158/4/2-48, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Association Minute Books 1932-1936.

feminism evident in some parts of the post-war women's movement did not appear to pose a dilemma for those active in WCAs during the interwar era in Cardiff. Moreover, this could also suggest that there has been an over-dichotomising of feminist politics.³¹ The issues on which these women chose to campaign reflects the continuities with concerns which related to women and children's welfare and the demands for social reform which were made in the pre-war women's movement by a range of philanthropic, charitable and suffrage organisations. What was new was their enhanced status as enfranchised citizens, united by and in possession of the vote, through which women sought to shape political agendas. The records of the CDWCA therefore reflect the diversity of campaigns and a range of political activity, where the divisions between 'old' and 'new' feminism did not appear to cause

31 GA, GB 0214 DX158/2/1, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Association Minute Books 1921-28. The binary 'equality' v 'difference debate' has been extensively discussed: Gisela Bock, and Susan James, (eds.), *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, feminist politics and female subjectivity* (London, 1992); Patrizia Longo, 'Revisiting the Equality/Difference Debate: Redefining Citizenship for the New Millennium', *Citizenship Studies*, 5, 3, (2001), pp.269-284; Wendy Sarvasy, 'Beyond the Difference versus Equality Policy Debate: Postsuffrage Feminism, Citizenship and the Quest for a Feminist Welfare State', *Signs*, 1992, pp.329-362; Joan Wallach Scott, 'Deconstructing equality-versus-difference: Or the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism', *Feminist Studies*, 14, 1, (1988), pp.33-50.

tensions or divisions amongst the members of this non-party organisation.³²

Networks and inter-organisational connections

The CDWCA shared similar characteristics to WCAs in other localities, especially in regard to the development of networks amongst women and other organisations. These often proved vital to enhance their work. From its inception the CDWCA had a range of close ties to a variety of different organisations, and would utilise these to garner support or add weight to a campaign. This was evident in the very first contribution made by the CDWCA in 1921, adding its support to the campaign for women police, and working together with the local branches of the Co-op Women's Guilds, the National Council of Women, the women's section of the Labour Party and the Association for Moral Welfare. These inter-organisational networks were subsequently utilised and reciprocated the following year when a campaign was launched by the CDWCA to address the issue of high maternal mortality rates.³³

32 The records of the Cardiff and District Women Citizens Association mainly consist of minute books, annual reports, and newspaper press cutting reflecting the work of the organisation.

33 GA, GB 0214 DX158/2/1, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Association Minute Books 1921-22

The CDWCA also had ties to other local and regional WCAs. In 1922, a conference was held at Newport for the West of England and South Wales. Its purpose was to encourage more women to participate in public life and to educate them in active citizenship. This created an opportunity for like-minded women to come together and to reaffirm the intention and purpose of WCAs, as a Mrs E A Charles argued: 'one of the greatest needs of such an organisation [the Newport WCA] was to dispel the great apathy which prevailed amongst women with reference to citizenship and to all public work. Now that women had the vote it was necessary to educate them to their proper use.'³⁴ This message clearly struck a chord with those active in the CDWCA who the following month, organised a meeting at the Penarth Girls Club with the specific intention of encouraging more young women to play an active role in public life.

There were strong ties between WCAs in South Wales, which were in existence throughout the interwar era. In 1931, the CDWCA together with members from Swansea, Ebbw Vale, Abertillery, and Newport branches came together to celebrate the life and work of Winifred Coombe-Tennant before she moved from her home in South Wales to London. This woman had been an active suffragette and subsequently

³⁴ GA, GB 0214 DX158/2/2-95, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Scrap Book and Press Cuttings

represented the British Government at the League of Nations; she was the first woman magistrate in Glamorgan and was well known for her work with women prisoners and juvenile delinquents in Swansea.³⁵

The Cardiff WCA also maintained its connections through their membership to constitutional suffrage organisations and to existing peace organisations. In 1923, the association invited Miss Helen Fraser to speak at a reception, held in the City Hall on the future of the women's movement. Three years later, in 1926, they sent one of its members, Miss Jane Roberts to the Peacemakers Pilgrimage Suffrage March in London. There were also international ties between the CDWCA and suffrage organisations, through connections to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship.³⁶

Networks also proved significant to sustaining and politicising national causes. In 1938, the CDWCA sent its delegates to the 'Status of Women Day', a conference organised by the League of Nations Commission of Jurists. The purpose of this was to politicise the inequalities women in Britain still faced. Objectives included amongst other things, equal pay for women in civil and local government

³⁵ *Western Mail & South Wales News* 14 December 1931

³⁶ GA, GB 0214 DX158/2/1 Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Monthly Minutes March 1921-April 1928

services and admission of peeresses, in their own right, to sit in the House of Lords. The CDWCA was therefore part of a vibrant national network of women's organisations, in this instance working collaboratively with the National Women Citizens' Association and the National Council of Women.³⁷

Similar networks and meetings occurred in other parts of Britain. The Manchester and Salford WCA attended the North West Federation of Women Citizens Association and the Glasgow Women Citizens Association formed a Scottish Council. The formation of networks proved vital for WCAs, as for other non-party organisations during the interwar era.³⁸ In Wales, as in parts of England and Scotland, they enabled women in WCAs to draw strength from, and tap into, existing connections, many of which had been established in the pre-war women's movement. This allowed women to gather support for their various campaigns and such networks were effective as they enabled them to exert considerable influence in making demands for reforms and being able to serve the needs of different groups. As a local

37 GA, GB 0214 DX675, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Minute book of annual meetings

38 C. Beaumont, 'Women and citizenship: a study of non-feminist women's societies and the women's movement in England, 1928-1950', unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Warwick University, (1996); Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement*, (London, 1996)

newspaper reported of the Cardiff branch, 'that the Cardiff Women Citizens Association, as a branch of the National Council of Equal Citizenship, had played a prominent part in securing the freedoms and privileges which women enjoyed today.'³⁹

Active women citizens

The CDWCA archives are an important repository of Welsh women's history and as such they indicate that this was one of the country's several dynamic and vibrant women's organisations. It sought to influence local and national political agendas and played a key role in shaping women's politics in the interwar period. The Association's work in recruiting more members appears to have expanded following the Representation of the People Act (Equal Franchise Act) 1928. The CDWCA organised more study circles and discussion groups to debate how they could, as a body of women, address issues such as juvenile unemployment and the need for more and better housing. They invited well-known and respected men such as the local Medical Officer of Health, Dr Ralph Picken, to give talks on clean food, and the need for a clean milk supply. This was a well-organised autonomous women's organisation, having seasonal programmes of work to sustain interest amongst its membership by diversifying the topics for discussion and

³⁹ GA, GB 0214 DX675, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Minute books of annual meetings – 1929-45, newspaper cutting on areas of interest to the Association.

having a range of campaigns under way. Women in the CDWCA successfully raised money to support the work of the association through garden parties, teas and sales of work.⁴⁰

The Association's records also reflect a clear conception of what 'citizenship' meant to women and the development of a distinctive form of women's politics in south Wales, where women had new rights and responsibilities in light of enfranchisement. Women in the CDWCA interpreted 'active citizenship' as a way in which to carve out a new role for women in public life and shape a new form of women's politics. As the president of the CDWCA Mrs. F. J. Jenkins made clear in her address at the 1926, annual general meeting:

its work was especially necessary today, being to educate women on matters political along non-party lines, and to encourage them to take a greater interest in civic affairs. By virtue of such as association they could obtain and maintain the true spirit of citizenship. The time had gone when women's interests in public affairs were merely tolerated. It was now fully

40 GA, GB 0214 DX675, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Minute book; DX158, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Scrap Book and Press Cuttings

recognised that there was a specific mission in public life today that only women could effectively perform.⁴¹

These women saw it as their duty and responsibility to encourage more women to participate in public life to ensure that the lives of women and children could be improved. One of the key roles of the CDWCA was therefore to 'educate women up to their responsibility as citizens'.⁴² This enabled members of the CDWCA to pursue welfare goals and equality issues and to engage in the political process to alleviate problems experienced by women in families and in work. Just as the vote had been a 'symbol and a key', so too the idea of the 'active woman citizen' was a way in which women could legitimate their practices and actions in public life. It was a process that was also evident across WCAs in other localities.⁴³

Whilst there were many similarities of issues on which WCAs campaigned throughout their lifetime, such as the demand for a clean

41 GA, GB 0214 DX158/2/1, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Monthly Minute book and scrap book (mainly annual meetings) March 1926-1927.

42 GA, GB 0214 DX158/2/1, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Monthly Minute book

43 Innes, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship', Smith, 'The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association'.

milk supply, and more women to be elected to public bodies, there were also distinctive elements and achievements. Unlike some WCAs, the Cardiff association chose to affiliate to the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, reflecting its interest in certain national issues and campaigns. For example, they lobbied and wrote to MPs seeking support for the equal franchise, for widow's pensions and to increase the age of marriage. The CDWCA also contributed to a number of successful campaigns which took several years to achieve. The demands for women police in Cardiff for which the CDWCA had actively campaigned from 1921, was hard fought, and finally obtained in 1948. The CDWCA sought to improve road safety and lobbied Cardiff Members of Parliament to support the passing of the Road Traffic Bill in 1934. Together with the Pedestrians Association, the CDWCA sent deputations to the local city council's watch and public works committees during the 1920s and 1930s ultimately securing the provision of some road traffic islands and traffic calming measures.⁴⁴

Some English WCAs pursued other issues and with some success: in Manchester, for example, the members of the WCA worked collaboratively with local women organisations and male Liberal

44 GA, GB 0214 DX158/2/1 Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Monthly Minutes March 1921-April 1928; DX158/4/1 Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Monthly Minutes April 1932-September 1938;

councillors to rescind the marriage bar against women teachers.⁴⁵ It appears that different issues were pursued in WCAs across England, Scotland and Wales and in some instances, this reflected local or national issues women wished to challenge. There does appear to be some distinction amongst WCAs as Innes has demonstrated of the Edinburgh WCA, where campaigns undertaken may have reflected a sense of Scottish independence and with the local association choosing not to affiliate to the National Council of Women Citizens Association whilst engaging in local activities.⁴⁶

Membership of Women Citizens Association

A common aim shared by WCAs was to recruit new women voters and educate them in active citizenship. Eleanor Rathbone, pioneer of the first WCA in Liverpool, intended the association to be places where married working women, many of whom had not participated in the women's movement as they were shy of organisations run by the 'the well to do', could meet. Women could come together with those already active in the broader women's movement to maximise the

45 Smith, 'The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association', chapter 5.

46 Innes, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship', pp. 626-27.

potential of their newly won status as citizens.⁴⁷ How did this work in Cardiff?

In some respect the ways in which women were drawn in to WCAs were similar. They adopted a non-party status to encourage women from all political parties as well as those not active in political circles to join these associations. Unsurprisingly this echoed the similar approach taken by some suffrage societies. Some of the post-war suffrage history suggests that most WCAs were dominated by middle class women and lacked a working class element which Rathbone had intended. More recent scholarship has begun to challenge this, although further studies are needed.⁴⁸ The subscription rate in CDWCA as in other WCAs demonstrates that these were purposely kept low, so as not to exclude women from participating on financial grounds. That said, mapping the membership of these associations is not without difficulty, and restoring women back into the historical narrative can be problematical. Many WCAs including the CDWCA did not list its rank and file membership, thus it becomes difficult to ascertain the class

47 WL, Eleanor Rathbone, 'Women Citizens Associations' *Common Cause*, 30 June 1916.

48 Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, (Hampshire, 1992), p.50; C. Law, *Suffrage and Power The Women's Movement 1918-1928* (London, 2000), pp.232-237; Innes, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship', p.628.

composition of this particular WCA. Evidence from the Manchester branch indicates that in this locality the local branches had some success in recruiting 'working women'.⁴⁹ In its work for women and during its campaigns, the CDWCA did not differentiate along lines of class, ethnicity or marital status, nor were these problematically defined. They often referred to themselves as working on behalf of 'all women'. It is likely however, that most working women frequented other spaces as members of the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG) or women's sections of the Labour Party. As Helen Thomas has valuably demonstrated in her work there were one hundred and fifty Guild branches with approximately 2000 women members in the WCG in South Wales from 1891 to 1939 and some 9,000 women in the Labour Party. Some women held membership in both organisations. The Labour Party was largely successful in recruiting women due to the energies of its full time paid organiser Elizabeth Andrews.⁵⁰ In terms of WCA leadership, as in other locations the CDWCA activists often were well known and had both time and resources to dedicate to various campaigns.⁵¹

49 Smith, 'The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association' chapter 2.

50 Helen Thomas, 'A Democracy of Working Women', p.154

The CDWCA boasted a variety of professional or well known women members who sat on the CDWCA executive council. The president of the association was often the Lady Mayoress, such as Mrs Charles, formerly a school teacher, she became president of the Women's War Club, served on the board of guardians for the Roath Park district and for many years was president of the Penlyan Ward Women's Liberal Association. Other members included a Miss Mabel Howell whose family owned a leading Cardiff department store. She had been active in the CDWSS and had engaged in a range of philanthropic activities and university settlement work, which could be described as typical of her generation.⁵² There were some who worked in education, and who knew each other through their profession, and through local suffrage work, such as Professor Barbara Foxely, and Miss Ethel M. Barke who worked for the education department at Cardiff University College, the latter became a president of the CDWCA during the 1930s. There was also the eminent local headmistress of the Cardiff High School for Girls, Miss Mary Collin, who together with Barbara Foxley were elected to the first CDWCA executive council in 1921. They were joined by some members of the landed aristocracy such as Mrs Henry Lewis, leading

51 GA, GB 0214 DX158, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Association press cuttings, programmes, meeting notices and yearly reports.

52 Masson, 'political conditions in wales are quite different...' p. 376.

suffragist and first CDWCA president. Throughout the 1920s they were joined by other women such as Mrs Lillian Homfray Williams. She had been a prolific social worker during the First World War as an official visitor for the Soldiers and Sailors Association, where she organised munitions canteens, and became secretary to the Cardiff British Legion Women's Section. She also was an active Conservative worker and became chairman of the Cardiff East Division Women's Section.⁵³

Structure of the CDWCA

In Cardiff, as in other localities, there was an annually elected body of executive members with local branches which were organised by district, ward or parliamentary divisions. In Cardiff local branches were formed via parliamentary division, as in Edinburgh, whilst in Manchester and Salford there were organised by ward. In terms of size, in its first five years, from 1921 to 1926, the Cardiff organisation had a body of some 550 members.⁵⁴ In other localities, there were notably fewer as in Aldershot and Morecambe, whereas in Edinburgh and

⁵³ GA, GB 0214 DX158, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Monthly Minute books and scrap books 1921-1936; Masson, 'political conditions in wales are quite different...' p. 374-377.

⁵⁴GA, GB 0214 DX158, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Monthly Minute book 1926-27; Smith, 'The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association' chapter 2.

Manchester membership ranged from 1,000 to 3,000 members.⁵⁵ It can therefore be suggested that the Cardiff organisation was a medium-sized WCA.

In terms of its members, the CDWCA were able to recruit new women annually throughout most of the 1920s. However, the net membership remained fairly static owing to the mortality of older members. Some historians, including Pamela Graves and Martin Pugh, have suggested that throughout the 1920s political parties recruited women at the expense of non-party organisations such as WCAs, which, in turn led to a decline in the membership of the latter.⁵⁶ Yet, this picture is far from complete. In Cardiff, demographic changes meant that they lost members. They still recruited new ones and similar evidence exists for other parts of England and Scotland. In both the Edinburgh and Manchester branches they were able to successfully recruit members throughout the 1920s and sustain this in to the first part of the 1930s.⁵⁷

55GB 106 5NWC National Women Citizens Association, Remarks on Visits to Associations, 23 February 1931; Innes, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship', p.628; Smith, 'The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association' chapter 2.

56Pamela Graves, *Labour Women, Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939*, (Cambridge, 1994)pp.122-124; Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement* pp.50-51, 59-61, p.236.

57 Innes, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship', p.622; Smith, 'The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association chapter 2'.

There also appears to be something distinctive about WCAs in terms of attracting women members, compared to other non-party organisations. For example, the Open Door Council (ODC), a non-party feminist organisation, which pressed for equal economic opportunities for women, only attracted a small number of women in to its ranks. WCAs appear to have had a greater level of success in attracting members and this could be attributable to the largely diverse range of issues on which they campaigned, and therefore having a broader appeal. Or it could be due to the ODC being viewed as an overtly 'feminist' organisation which only campaigned on 'equality issues' and therefore had a limited membership.⁵⁸

On many occasions the CDWCA did discuss particularly throughout the 1920s the problems of recruiting new members. This was clearly evident when the Equal Franchise had been won in 1928, where women could vote on the same terms as men from the age of twenty-one. Attracting a new cohort of members was an important part of the CDWCA work as they saw this as another opportunity to develop women's roles as citizens. At an Annual General Meeting of 1928 when reflecting on the work of the previous year, their correspondent reported that: 'the keynote of several of the speeches was the

⁵⁸ Peter Gordon, and David Doughan, (eds.), *Dictionary of British Women's Organisations 1825-1960* (London, 2001).

desirability of attracting more “under thirties” and bringing home to the newly-enfranchised young women the full meaning of citizenship.’⁵⁹ This appears to have proved a challenge for those active in the CDWCA, and the local press is indicative that this continued to be a concern throughout the 1930s. As stated earlier, the paucity of membership records makes it difficult to obtain a fuller picture beyond this period. That said, the CDWCA did exist until 1974, so in some ways a level of membership was maintained, certainly until key members who kept the organisation running died. In other places such as Manchester and Edinburgh the partial and equal franchise appears to have invigorated these WCA branches, although they too did note the difficulty of recruiting young members at different times.⁶⁰

A crucial event which impacted on the development of the CDWCA was the outbreak of the Second World War which disrupted much of the work undertaken by the association. The CDWCA chose to suspend its activities, just as suffrage societies had done so during the First World War. The hiatus brought about by war certainly impacted on the reformulation of the Cardiff WCA, where, although records indicate that

⁵⁹ GA, GB 0214 DX158, Cardiff and District Women Citizens’ Monthly Minute book 1927-1928.

⁶⁰ Smith, ‘The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens’ Association’ chapter 2.

activities were resumed after 1945, the association appears to have operated in a reduced form until it closed in 1974. A similar account is evident for WCAs in other part of the United Kingdom.⁶¹ Clearly whilst WCAs were relatively long-lasting reformulated women's organisations, an aging membership in the post-war era, and an inability to recruit new members combined with a lack of finance often brought about its closure.

Non-Party Status

WCAs were determinedly non-party and they organised along such lines. They would be spaces where women who were active in political organisations could work collaboratively with those who chose to work outside of party politics. Their political colouring varied across Britain. What impact did this have on the Cardiff association and how does this compare with WCAs in other localities? As has already been suggested, the suffrage tradition of a local region could play an important precursory role in the construction of interwar women's movements, and mapping out specific regional experiences is crucial to reveal subtle nuances in Welsh women's suffrage history. As the late Ursula Masson had shown, there had been a much more complex account for

⁶¹ Smith, 'The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association' chapter 6.

Welsh women suffragists compared to the broader British experiences. Indeed there was distinctiveness about Welsh women's suffrage.⁶²

There had been a good deal of opposition by those active in the constitutional movement in South Wales to the NUWSS policy of 1912, the Electoral Fighting Fund, as it was known, of pledging electoral support to the Labour Party. The most determined opposition came from the South Wales Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies. This was not simply attributable to the issue of party politics, for Welsh women loyalties to class interests, women's feminism, familial ties and party politics could also be significant.⁶³ For those who went on to be active in the CDWCA this matter had not been forgotten. When it came to the proposal of supporting their own members for election to the municipality the WCA in Cardiff could not circumvent its staunchly non-party position. Although members were interested in political questions on the whole they tried to avoid controversial issues of a party political nature. There were some discussions as to whether they should stand their own independent women citizens' candidates in municipal elections or how far they could as an organisation support those

62 Ursula Masson, 'Divided Loyalties: Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in South Wales 1912-1915', *Llafur*, 1198-1999, 3&4, pp. 113-126.

63 Ursula Masson, *'For Women, for Wales and for Liberalism' Women in Liberal Politics in Wales 1880-1914*, (Cardiff, 2010).

standing on a party ticket. However, when these discussions took place throughout the 1920s, the proposals were rejected, partly to avoid splits along party political lines and also due to a lack of opportunity because of the local political environment.

The CDWCA wanted the local state to increase its interventionism in the provision of welfare services for women and children, plans which received a hostile reception from the anti-Socialist alliance and the press throughout the 1920s and the 1930s. When women attempted to stand in municipal elections to try and bring about improvements they were faced with an overtly antagonistic right-wing press in the form of the *Western Mail* and political barriers brought about by the formation of an anti-socialist alliance between Conservatives and Liberals as a response to Labour gains in local municipal elections in 1919.⁶⁴ This situation was still evident in Cardiff some ten years later: 'the appearance of two women as candidates for the Canton Ward at the next municipal elections in Cardiff has naturally caused a good deal of feeling, and it is thought that some influential persons should intervene in order to secure the withdrawal of one of them. Otherwise there is a possibility that the seat will be won by the Socialists'.⁶⁵ This was not

64 GA, GB 0214 DX158, Cardiff and District Women Citizens' Monthly Minute books 1921-23; *Western Mail*, 8 October, 1934; *Western Mail*, 26 November 1934.

65 GA, DX 675/1 Minute Book of Annual Meeting newspaper cuttings

the only objection advanced against women's participation in local municipal politics; a more direct attack was also launched by local men: 'to put up women candidates for the Canton Ward at all is simply making a present of the seat to the opposition. Women are not required in municipal politics or for that matter in national politics, and from what I understand women are not enthusiastically received by other members of our city council.'⁶⁶ A similar picture is evident for many parts of England and Scotland although there are some notable exceptions, for example the Cambridge WCA successfully promoted and secured the election of women to the town council for much of the interwar period.⁶⁷ A further comparative study of local newspapers and press attitudes towards women's activism in WCAs is an area for further research. Given the difficult historic relationship between women suffragists and political parties it is not surprising to see why women chose to organise along non-party lines. Although as Pugh has suggested they under-estimated the dominance of political parties and

66 GA, DX 675/1 Minute Book of Annual Meeting newspaper cuttings

67 Smith, 'The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association' chapter 6.

as Thane has shown women continued to be frustrated by the political parties throughout the interwar era.⁶⁸

All that said the CDWCA was nevertheless keen to ensure that women from across the political spectrum joined the organisation and this was reflected in its membership, bringing women together to campaign on a range of issues irrespective of party political differences. There was an eclectic political mix amongst the membership of the CDWCA and included committee members such as Miss Muriel Sanders and Professor Barbara Foxley, who were both elected as Liberal candidates to the local City Council; Mrs Homfray Williams, President of the Cardiff WCA in 1929, who was chairman of the Conservative Cardiff East Division Women's Section and Mrs Anna Kerrigan, a CDWCA member who was successfully elected as the Labour candidate to the Adamsdown Ward in Cardiff during 1944. In other localities, there were some similarities and differences compared to the Cardiff organisation. For example, the Derby branch was similar being described as a 'most satisfactory Association, visited from the point of view of the blending of members of all political parties'.⁶⁹ In the Manchester and Salford

⁶⁸ Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, p. 71; Patricia Thane 'What difference did the vote make? Women in public and private life in Britain since 1918', *Institute of Historical Research*, 76, 192, (May, 2003), pp.1-18.

⁶⁹ GB 106 5NWC National Women Citizens Association, Remarks on Visits to Associations

Women Citizens Association, there were some subtle differences which reflected the political cultures of the town and city councils in each city, with a greater preponderance of Conservative women in the Salford branches and Liberal women in the Manchester association.⁷⁰ A different picture presents itself in Glasgow where the WCA were aligned with the Glasgow Good Government Committee to combat the rise of socialism in local government in the city.⁷¹ Locality and the existing external political cultures appear to have shaped the development of WCAs. For the most part, certainly for women active in the CDWCA, who belonged to political parties, they were prepared to put differences to one-side and work collaboratively, thus demonstrating that women's politics were above party politics.

Conclusion

This article has offered an additional account to the existing historiography of Welsh women's non-party political activism by reflecting the vibrancy and dynamics in the development of the South Wales Women Citizen Association throughout the interwar period. It

70 Smith, 'The Manchester and Salford Women Citizens' Association' chapter 2.

71 Innes, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship', p.627.

has shown how in Cardiff the concept of active citizenship brought women together in the CDWCA and that this was common in other branches across Britain. It was a way in which, following the partial and equal franchise, women could re-formulate and reinvigorate pre-war organisations with the power of the vote. The ethos of women's citizenship was not simply an idea, but conferred status and demanded practice. The CDWCA, like the branches in Edinburgh and Manchester were able to sustain a broad agenda of women's politics incorporating and crossing the boundaries of 'equality' and 'difference' feminism to address what they saw as the most important issues on which to campaign for over fifty years. This allowed women in South Wales to try and enhance the position of women and justify their participation in public life as newly enfranchised active citizens. Thus, they were able to continue to campaign for social reforms related to women's and children's welfare which had been evident in the pre-war women's movement, alongside campaigns for the equal franchise and equal opportunities. CDWCA members sought to influence the local and national political agendas through various activities and were supported via an array of networks and inter-organisational connections. In South Wales, for a variety of cultural, economic and political reasons, women chose to work through organisations such non-party political WCAs, in socialist organisations through the WCG or women's sections of the Labour Party and in peace organisations such

as the WILPF. Women in WCAs in South Wales were part of a vibrant and dynamic array of women's organisations which believed that women's participation in public life as influencing the decision making processes was a key part of their role as enfranchised citizens. They worked together with like-minded women, having close ties and networks to campaign on a range of local, national and international issues. These women knew that change would be slow and campaigns hard fought as they laid the foundations for a better future for Cardiff's citizens.

The work and activities of the CDWCA are an important part of Welsh women's history as in some respects they were similar and different when compared to WCAs in England and Scotland. The CDWCA was uncompromising in its position as a non-party political organisation, choosing not to adopt its own women citizen's candidates for municipal elections, in contrast to Cambridge where the WCA did successful run its own candidates. This could be attributed to the existing socio-economic and political culture combined with suffrage traditions in South Wales which were clearly different when compared to the British movement more generally. The CDWCA was also different when compared to WCAs in both Manchester and Edinburgh as in these cities they chose not to affiliate to the National Women Citizens Association,

yet the Cardiff branch joined the national body from its inception. This does suggest that for some WCAs the issue of independence was important, but not necessarily for all branches. This account of the CDWCA has extended our understanding of South Welsh women activism in non-party political organisations and adds a further strand to accounts of the significant work carried out by women in Wales during the interwar period.

Dr Joanne Smith

Senior Lecturer in History

Dept. History, Politics and Philosophy

Manchester Metropolitan University

j.n.smith@mmu.ac.uk

01612471657

