

ELSIE HOWEY (1884 - 1963)

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Elsie Howey. Image from Wikipedia (Public Domain).

Elsie Howey was a suffragette who helped introduce the movement into Devon, and particularly into Torbay. She may not be as well-known as Emily Davison or Emmeline Pankhurst but like them she was willing to cause harm to her health to get the vote.

Elsie Howey was born in Finningley in 1884 and before she became a suffragette she studied languages at St. Andrew's University. After leaving University Howey joined the Women's Social and Political Union in 1907. Her first imprisonment happened when she was arrested for protesting outside the House of Commons. She was next imprisoned after she took part in a protest outside Herbert Asquith's house and was sentenced to 3 months. On her release she and Vera Wentworth were met at the gates of Holloway Prison by 50 women and were driven in a carriage to Queen's Hall.

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Her most famous, but not most notorious act came next. In 1909 she rode on horseback dressed as Joan of Arc in a procession to welcome the release from prison of Emily Pethick Lawrence who was another suffragette. Howey's act made the national papers. She later repeated this act when she wore the same costume for Emily Davison's funeral procession.

In the same year she, Vera Wentworth and Annie Kenney assaulted Asquith and Hebert Gladstone while they were playing golf. Her friend and fellow suffragette Emily Blathwayt was horrified by her actions. Emily resigned from the Union because of this and Elsie was no longer allowed to stay at Emily's house because of these events. In the same year she was arrested again for protesting in Penzance. She undertook hunger strike and fasted for 144 hours. After her release she worked to introduce the suffragette movement into Torquay and Plymouth.

Howey was extremely devoted to hunger strikes. In one case in 1912 it took her four months to recover from the force feeding that she received. In this case she was released early because many of her teeth were broken as a result. In 1914 she retired from public life when the suffragette movement ceased. She later went to live in Malvern and died there in 1963 of Chronic Pyloric Stenosis, which is condition that is rare in adults and most likely occurred as a result of the throat damage she

Biography
Researched and written by Elizabeth Strange, Curatorial Research Volunteer.

(1) Nokes Laura. Elsie Howey, 10th December 2018, The Portia Post,

<https://theportiapost.wordpress.com/2017/12/10/the-howey-sisters-and-the-young-hot-bloods/>

(2) Simkin John, Elsie Howey, August 2014, Spartacus Educational, Spartacus Education Publishers Ltd, <http://spartacus-educational.com/Whowley.htm>

(3) Elsie Howey, Wikipedia, 31st March 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elsie_Howey

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