



VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS

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SEMINAR ABSTRACT

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Campaigning for the Vote: Kate Frye's Two Roles: Volunteer Suffragist/Paid Suffrage Organizer (1906-15)

From the age of eight Kate Frye (1878-1959) was a diarist. Her daily entries, particularly until 1920 when she moved from using large ledgers to a ready-made format, are formidably detailed – packed with the minutiae of daily life. That life was most definitely middle-class; her father ran a small chain of grocery shops and in the 1890s was radical Liberal MP for North Kensington. Kate rarely mentions her father's shops but did enjoy her visits to the Ladies' Gallery in the House of Commons. However, although brought up in considerable comfort and - so typical of this segment of the middle-class - with no education worthy of the name, Kate was no stereotypical 'daughter at home'. Indeed it was particularly because she regretted her lack of education that from 1906 until 1915 she immersed herself in the women's suffrage campaign.

Most known 'suffrage' diaries were written by imprisoned militant suffragettes, their imprisonment defining their claim to this identity. Kate Frye's diary is unique in giving a detailed picture of life as a non-militant suffragist. Moreover during her time as a suffrage campaigner Kate played two distinct roles. From 1906 until the 1910 she was a member of the London Society for Women's Suffrage (a component of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, led by Millicent Fawcett) and in this period aided the cause in a voluntary capacity. But, when the Fryes' financial situation became desperate at the beginning of 1911, Kate gratefully accepted the offer of paid employment as an organizer for the newly-formed New Constitutional Society for Women's Suffrage.

Thus Kate Frye's diary allows us to set the experience of the volunteer suffrage campaigner alongside that of the paid organizer. In practical terms what were the differences between the work expected of a volunteer and that of an employee? What was life like as an itinerant suffrage organizer? What were the status implications of switching from volunteer to employee? For the answers to such questions the paper draws on the entries written by Kate in her diary, the period from 1911 having been edited and published as *Campaigning for the Vote: Kate Parry Frye's Suffrage Diary* (2013).