Auto/Biography Review

ISSN: 2755-2772
2025, Volume 6(1) 39-57

https://Autobiographyreview.com

Edge Hill's Ethel Snowden: Exploring the Narratives of Her Life 1881-1903.

Peer Reviewed Article

Christine Lewis
Independent Scholar
Contact: chrislewisorca@outlook.com

Abstract

Ethel (Annakin) Snowden (1881-1951) was a Socialist, a campaigner for women's suffrage, for temperance, and a lifelong believer in pacifism. In 1900, at just 19 years of age, she secured a place at the first non-denominational teacher training college for women in England and Wales, Edge Hill College, Liverpool (established 1885). Unfortunately, Ethel left no personal diaries or letters for posterity, so little is known of her personal teacher training experiences. Yet, between 1907-26, Ethel would go on to author four books and four pamphlets. In this article, I draw on two of these *The Woman Socialist*, 1907 and *The Feminist Movement*, 1913. Additionally, she later gained a reputation for being a powerful and passionate speaker, her "inspirational style" was referred to as "sparkling with epigram, bright with humour and satire, *and* sympathetic with pathos and feeling" (Cross, 1966: 68).

Interestingly, the archives at Edge Hill University do not contain any hint of Ethel's powerful and passionate rhetoric in the years 1900-02, yet her activities in the city of Liverpool do give an insight into the activist she would become. For these reasons I aim to set Ethel's formative experiences in the context of national, cultural, and religious occurrences of the period 1881-1903, and feature some of the personalities Ethel knew most closely. A 'topical life history' approach is most fitting for this purpose in that it is only this phase of Ethel's life that I intend to explore at this time (Denzin 2009: 222). Where I am unable to present a neat chronological account, as the archival and secondary evidence available is fragmentary, I attempt a form of historiography (Gottschalk 1945 in Denzin 2009: 246) in reconstructing past events. I also aim to give voice to Ethel Annakin, through secondary sources and through her aforementioned publications, irrespective of their later publication date.

In this way I can portray a story that notices the silences, that notices what is told as well as what is not told, and importantly a story that 'attend(s) to the contradictions' (Munro 1998 12-13). For example, given the resolute, dedicated and renowned nature of her lifelong work we may ask why Ethel Snowden is not more celebrated and why her influence is largely absent from contemporary publications. Perhaps her marriage to Philip Snowden (later Viscount Snowden) MP and Chancellor of the Exchequer in the first Labour Government (1924) overshadowed her own importance to women's socialist history. What becomes clear is that from her activist beginnings Ethel Annakin always fought to eradicate social injustices whenever and wherever she perceived them, confirming that the years 1881-1903 were fundamental to her later endeavours as a member of the Fabian Society, the Independent Labour Party, and The Women's Peace Crusade.

Keywords

Ethel Snowden; Edge Hill College; suffrage; life history; primitive methodism; socialism

Beginnings

In 2019 Edge Hill University opened their new flagship library, naming it The Catalyst. Once inside, and immediately to the right is a permanent compelling seven-foot-high display, with life size photographs of three influential women to the history of Edge Hill College. They are Sarah Hale, a long-serving Principal of Edge Hill College, 1890-1920; Helena Normanton, who completed her teacher training at Edge Hill 1903-5 and made history as the first female barrister in the United Kingdom; and Ethel Snowden (1881-1951).

Ethel (Annakin) Snowden began her teacher training at Edge Hill, in September 1900, she was student number 766 and as the Student Register Entry for 1900 (Edge Hill Archive Catalogue EHU/STU/1/1) shows the result of her entrance examination was 175.: The scores of students on this page seem to vary considerably, so unfortunately, we do not know what this score equates to.

Figure 1: Edge Hill College, Durning Road, Liverpool.[1]

Walking further into the Catalyst building visitors will find the Edge Hill University archive. Yet I am not a visitor, I have been a senior lecturer in Education at Edge Hill since 2008. In fact, I have a thirty-year association with Edge Hill college and latterly university. In 1995 I began a BA in History, progressing onto a PGCE (Post Graduate Certification in Education), to become a secondary school history teacher. Latterly I completed an MA Education at Edge Hill before completing my PhD at Lancaster University. My autobiography is therefore irrevocably connected to Edge Hill and to the women who trained to be teachers before me, like Ethel.

I was fascinated to find what secrets the archive may hold, so in 2021 I began searching the archive, intrigued by being one of the first people to see these records and the possibilities that could unfold. After several visits it was the lives of the women who attended the college that grew to fascinate me. I wanted to know their biographies and particularly how their time at Edge Hill may have shaped their life stories, as it shaped mine. On one of my visits, dedicated staff proudly showed me a burgeoning spreadsheet, chronicling details of past students. On the spreadsheet was the name Ethel Snowden, and her address, 11 Downing Street, London! Wow, who is this woman and why don't I know more about her. That was the beginning of a journey I'm still travelling. Here is what we know so far.

Figure 2: Ethel Snowden around the time of her marriage in 1905[2]

The Amazing Annakins of 'Arrogate'

Ethel was the eldest child of Richard and Hannah Annakin (Hymas). Ethel had two sisters and a brother, Mabel (1883–1916), Florence Annakin Prath (1885-?) and Arthur Hymas Annakin (1888-1964). Ethel Annakin was born in Pannal, a small village suburb of Harrogate in 1881. From here Ethel would have been able to walk into Harrogate and the train station in around 20 minutes. At that time Harrogate was a nationally and internationally renowned spa resort, the wealth of the town being significantly boosted by an influx of affluent but poorly visitors who visited to take advantage of the many health treatments.

The Annakin's were Primitive Methodists. Indeed, when searching for the surname 'Annakin' on the Primitive Methodist website I come across 'The amazing Annakin's of 'Arrogate', all 361 of them. Richard, Ethel's father, was the 13th of 14 children, a successful businessman, and active in the life of the town as a Councillor and Alderman, latterly becoming Mayor of Harrogate in 1930 (My Primitive Methodists, The Amazing Annakins of 'Arrogate). Clearly the political streak in the Annakin's was embodied by Richard, evident in his public work. Nevertheless, undertaking civic deeds for the wellbeing of the community was not an isolated occurrence, at this time and particularly after the Reform Act of 1884, the idea of 'municipal socialism' became widespread across Britain (Gehrke 2016 : 48). During this period the so-called natural order of things, and of religion underpinning the state was becoming outmoded, overtaken by liberal ideas that the state and community should work together for the good of all. Alternative paths of thought emerged, encompassing different ways of re-examining the state, interestingly too the movement to modernise social policy was not limited to middle class Protestants (e.g. Methodists), Catholics or Jews:

> …far from being sealed off from one another — the membership of socialist, philanthropic, denominational and civic-reform associations in the Edwardian period and later often overlapped (Harris 1992 :121)

In the Annakin family, the political fervour and appetite for doing good works for the people was unmistakable, and I anticipate an important influence on Ethel's formative years.

Primitive Methodism and Socialism

The fact that Ethel was brought up in the Primitive Methodist tradition is important to understanding her burgeoning values and beliefs and the groups she would begin to identify with as a young woman. Similarly, as a person who admires Ethel Snowden, I acknowledge that my values and beliefs were also shaped by being brought up in a family that worshiped at a Congregational Church, another protestant denomination that share similarities with Primitive Methodism. For example, both denominations believed that individual churches should be governed autonomously, demonstrating democratic principles and equal rights; that they should include lay people (not a member of the clergy); and that preaching should include passionate and direct appeals to the individual believer (Britannica). Primitive Methodists and Congregationalists also believed in social reform. Perhaps these are good reasons I feel an empathetic connection with Ethel Annakin's experiences and have been inspired to find out more about her. Even though the philosophies underpinning our upbringing are similar, it's interesting that they occurred more than 60 years apart. However, Primitive Methodism was different than Congregationalism in one distinct aspect, namely in their belief to reach the working classes and marginalized communities, which created a group that would most likely challenge existing societal norms (Bebbington 2014).

Writing on the themes of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity in her book *The Woman Socialist,* Ethel set out her belief in these principles:

> Liberty of thought, speech and of action, within the safety and happiness of the State; equality of opportunity for the development of each individual along his own lines, for the glory of the State; and universal brotherhood for the good of humanity are the ideals of the Socialists of this and other countries (Snowden 1907:10).

Whilst Primitive Methodism started in the working classes the greater membership was amongst the semi-skilled manual workers like Ethel's father, Richard. Primitive Methodism was therefore a movement that by the end of the 19th century embraced 'the secular virtues of thrift, industry, self-

discipline, and respectability' (Johnson 2016:7). All values we can see in Ethel throughout her life. It was also a movement that gave members a sense of hope as individuals, a set of values, a community, and a sense of purpose, especially during a period of immense industrialisation, when populations were dislocated from their established homes, resulting in a higher prevalence of urban poverty, and often inadequate working conditions.

An interesting aside which is explored later (A Fighting Parson for Social Reform) is that I have yet to find any evidence of Ethel's attendance at Primitive Methodist gatherings after she moved from Harrogate in 1900 to train to be a teacher in Liverpool. I have no doubt that the sermons Ethel heard from the Rev Aked in Liverpool had an impact on her. Sellars (1962) notes how Aked's preaching was capable of "Unhinging people's faith" (: 220), probably because they were less about biblical subjects, and much more likely to be debates on the latest book, play or political happening.

Perhaps like Ethel, my church attendance waned considerably in the years I trained to become a teacher and after. Yet like Ethel my philosophical roots seemed to be bolstered by a strong belief in the importance of equality, social justice, learning and education. Ethel's philosophical roots and purpose can clearly be seen in her future actions, in developing the ideas of Primitive Methodism, through promoting equality of education as the key to social change.

She states:

> Under Socialism boys and girls will receive exactly the same training and exercise in the fundamentals of a liberal education (Snowden 1907: 39).

Part of her belief in self-help called for promoting the principles of temperance to the working-classes, as Ethel noted:

> …women are the greatest sufferers from the drink habit, the conviction that the solution of every other problem is complicated by this question of intemperance, and the determination to save their children from the perils pf a practice which more than anything else, spoils the peace of households, and brings men and women to poverty and despair (Snowden 1907 : 114-5).

In summary, Ethel Annakin (Snowden) used her voice to argue for education, universal suffrage and temperance, to influence societal reform for the good of all.

It is of no doubt that there is a strong link between Methodism and the growth of socialism; "of all the Christian churches it was the Methodists who played the most significant role in the nineteenth century Labour Movement" (Scotland 1997: 47). Effectively, this meant that many of the first group of early 20th century Labour MPs were Methodist. Later, Morgan Phillips, General Secretary of the Labour Party (1944 - 1961) coined the phrase, "The Labour Party owes more to Methodism than to Marxism" (Oxford reference). This phrase was popularised by Denis Healey (MP from 1952-92) at the Socialist International Conference in Copenhagen 1953, and often after this by Harold Wilson (Prime Minister 1964-70 & 1974-6).

Suffrage Movements

Ethel's early family life and upbringing seemed to provide the roots from which she grew, honed and developed her political views. In her formative years, suffrage movements sprang up across the country demanding the vote for women, indeed by 1900 there were approximately 15 suffrage societies and groups across the UK (Women's Suffrage). For example, in 1889 The Women's Franchise League was

created by Emeline Pankhurst and others, this group and others of the time, held progressive views on modernizing marriage laws, encouraging co-education, and belonging to trade unions. Fourteen years later (1903) Emeline Pankhurst founded the Women's Social Political Union (WSPU), an organisation that attracted many working-class women, prepared to use force in their fight for the right to vote. Yet Ethel would not feel aligned to the suffragettes of the WSPU, but to the more moderate organisation of suffragists, in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The NUWSS was founded in 1897, the year when Ethel was 16 years of age and by 1905 it had over 305 constituent societies and almost 50,000 members (Copeland, History Review 2007). Whereas, in comparison, the more militant WSPU had a paltry 2,000 members in 1913 (British Library). The principles of the NUWSS aligned strongly with Ethel's values of peaceful campaigning, use of petitions and gaining change through the statute book. In 1901 she joined the NUWSS and by 1906, when she was 25 years old, she became one of their national speakers.

Mass Media

Significantly, Ethel's formative years were also characterised by the growth of newspapers as a mass media. Lower-middle class families like the Annakin's would be likely to have access to the broadsheet dailies and penny presses that were burgeoning in the 1880's-1900. Yorkshire was particularly well served by newspaper coverage. Notable publications included the Harrogate Herald (1847–1957), the Yorkshire Post—one of the oldest daily newspapers in Britain (1754–), and the Leeds Mercury (1718–1923), all of which had liberal leanings. For this reason, it is realistic to suggest that a socially and politically informed family such as the Annakin's, would be highly likely to be regular readers of newspapers.

It is interesting to note that newspapers such as the renowned Manchester Guardian took a more radical stance in opposing the Second Boer War (1899-1902). Due to this "it lost one-seventh of its circulation, but it managed to survive primarily because people bought it for the news about the cotton industry" (Hansen 2009:4). Ethel's opinions appear to align with the Manchester Guardian's editorship and their opposition of his so-called 'free-enterprise war'. Importantly like Ethel:

> …. the Manchester Guardian was 'the most energetic champion of feminism, democracy and left Liberalism'—although, significantly, like all mainstream papers, it did not support militancy (Kay and Mendes 2020: 140)

According to Purvis (2007) in The Guardian, the widespread support and large membership of the peaceful campaigning suffragists (NUWSS) indicates that many people at the time regarded the suffragettes' (WSPU) use of force as a breach of accepted gender norms for Edwardian ladies. In fact, Emmeline Pankhurst was labelled an undesirable alien, and guilty of 'moral turpitude' on landing in New York (Purvis 2003: 235). A charge which was later rescinded.

Growing up at the end of the 19th century meant that Ethel's life was impacted by the availability and rapid coverage of national and regional news and perhaps more importantly newspapers were considered agents of change (Jones 2016). Campaigns were created, with the aim of driving governments and legislators to pay attention to what the people wanted or needed. Ethel too must have realised the emerging importance of news media, and its capacity to influence. After 1903 particularly, Ethel would be a regular writer of speeches, pamphlets and books, spreading the word of socialism, suffrage and temperance, to name but three of her passions. Newspapers after the period I900-03 have reported headlines and quotations from her speeches, nonetheless, during my research to date, I have yet to find any of Ethel's speeches in their entirety. Perhaps archives of Ethel's associates such as Katherine Glaser and Millicent Fawcett, may produce results in this respect for future narratives.

The First Age of Terror

The backdrop to Ethel's early life involved what became known as the first 'Age of Terror' (Crossland 2023). Significantly, between 1867-1909, Britian was exposed to a bombing campaign, which became the first taste of modern terrorism for the mainland (Crossland 2024). The effect of this was to heighten panic across Britain with talk of conspiracy theories, and what we may now call fake news.

The events around the time of the first 'Age of Terror' are of interest to the study of Ethel's formative years in that no other place on mainland Britian was violence more amplified than in Liverpool. Liverpool was an exceptional city in the 1880's, set apart from other British cities as the 'least English' (Jenkins 2010 : 168). For example, the duality of Liverpudlian society meant communal relations had to be built between protestant/catholic and British/Irish, which at times resulted in the explosion of street violence and sectarianism. Therefore, Liverpool was seen as a 'riotous city' where 'liberalism, religious or political, did not thrive' (Sutherland 2013: 133). We know Ethel Annakin held a principally liberal outlook, so perhaps this did not deter her from attending college in Liverpool, on the contrary it could have galvanised her resolve.
We can glimpse a little of Ethel's determined personality when Cross (1966) tells us

> "She had insisted on leaving home to become a teacher" (: 60).

Given what we know now of Ethel's motivation to engage in causes close to her heart, such as human rights, pacifism and teetotalism, it is possible that she saw her time in Liverpool as both an educational and transformative experience.

1900-1902 – Edge Hill College

Opportunities for lower middle-class women to become teachers were burgeoning during the late 19th century, for example, at Edge Hill College, was founded in 1885 as the first non-denominational teacher training college for women.

Given that Ethel grew up in the Primitive Methodist tradition, it seems central to our understanding that the non-denominational nature of Edge Hill would have been a significant factor in her choice of this college. We can say this not because Ethel Annakin described this in diaries and letters, because agonisingly, she ensured that her personal correspondence was burned at her death, but because of the inherent beliefs of non-conformists such as Methodists, around their opposition to state interference in religious as well as educational matters. Because of these beliefs non-conformists founded their own churches and their own educational establishments, which did not 'conform' to The Church of England as the church of the state. In the years before the founding of colleges like Edge Hill, women who were believers in non-conformist faiths like Ethel would have had to apply to attend an educational establishment affiliated to the Church of England, or alternatively, be excluded from these opportunities.

Figure 3: The Seniors Classroom, Edge Hill College, Durning Road, Liverpool, circa 1900.[3]

Not only would Edge Hill's non-denominational status align with Ethel's non-conformist upbringing, but it would also speak to her developing values and beliefs, notably the eradication of poverty through education. On the other hand, it was unlikely that Ethel would apply to attend either of the other 2 non-denominational colleges in existence at that time. Notably, Froebel College (founded 1892), which later became the University of Roehampton, London, was perhaps too far from her home, and secondly, Charlotte Mason College (founded 1892), in Ambleside, which later became The University of Cumbria, as only governesses were trained here (de Bellaigue 2018). Edge Hill College was the obvious choice, and largely served students from Lancashire and Yorkshire, like herself. For instance, in the period that Ethel completed her training, more than 80% of students came from Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire and Cumberland; 'Edge Hill was essentially an institution of the north-west; less than 10 per cent came from outside this narrow catchment area' (Montgomery 1997: 20).

Ten years after Edge Hill College opened, an HMI report cited Edge Hill College as securing, 'the physical well-being, the intellectual development, and the efficient professional training of the students" on "a most liberal scale"' (Montgomery 1997: 8).

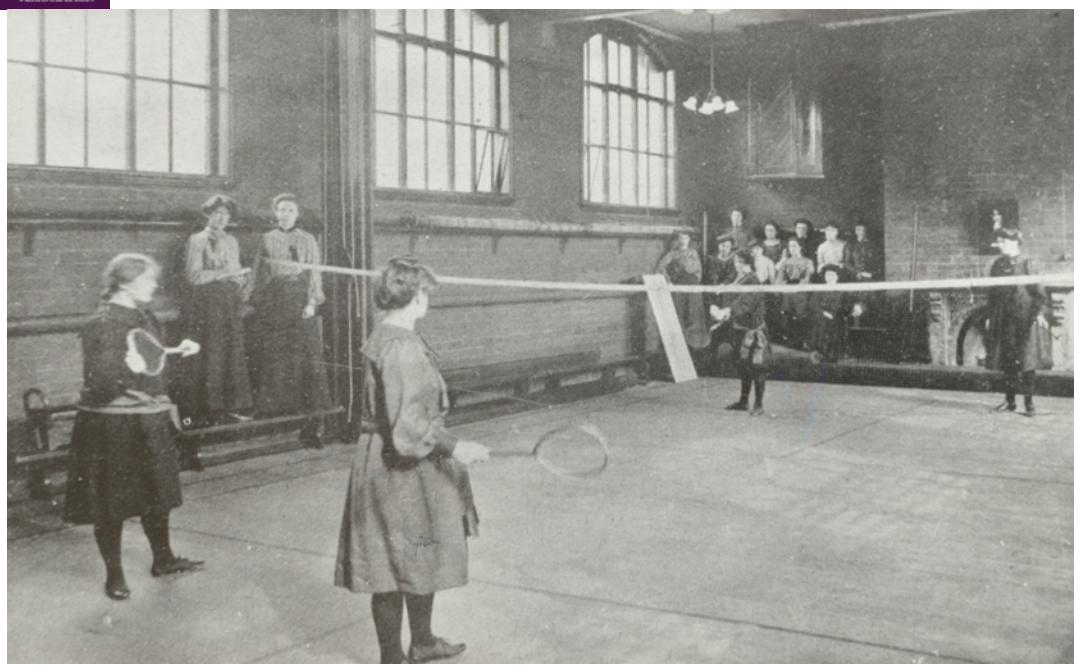

Figure 4: Students playing badminton in the gym at Edge Hill College Liverpool, circa 1900.[4]

This liberalism did not extend to the curriculum of course, in that the subjects' women were expected to study were highly gendered, for example women learned and were expected to be highly proficient at needlework.

Even though Edge Hill was the first non-denominational teacher training college for women, it was exceedingly likely during these times, that all students identified themselves as belonging to one of the several Christian denominations. For example, in 1900, Ethel's first year, there were at total of 62 students, 33/53% were non-conformists, like Ethel, compared with 29/47% Church of England (Montgomery 1997: 17).

The college principal between 1890 -1920 was Sarah Hale, who entrenched in Victorian values, would frequently express the importance of duty and service on her students. Her articulations may well have had an impact on Ethel, who also conveyed a sense of duty and service in her speeches and to her audiences throughout her life. In attempting to gain an insight into the relationship between these two women, principal and student, I searched the Edge Hill University archive. Unfortunately, the archival evidence in existence specifically for the years 1900-02 about Ethel, and her cohort is sparce. What has survived are copies of the annual College Magazine, financial reports, and a few staff and student registers/directory. Nevertheless, from the College Directory for 1900-02 we glean the names and destinations of the 63 students in Ethel's year group (Edge Hill Training College Directory, 1885-1905 EHU/PUB/4/1). However, we do know that Ethel Annakin was interested in the issues people faced in their daily lives, in political affairs, in pacifism, and a belief in the idea of service. We also know that Sarah Hale led a privileged life, indeed, her general response to outside events was of a patriotic conservative, and on several occasions, she displayed her outspoken nature, often using elaborate prose, on one occasion in vehemently opposing teachers strike action. Looking at life from a privileged position may have been responsible for Sarah Hale's difficulty in grasping the importance of class as a factor in politics (Montgomery 1997: 40). Yet, I cannot help but question if some of Sarah Hale's attributes may well have influenced Ethel, who was also outspoken had a "loud clear voice and specialised in emotional appeals" (Cross 1966: 68). Perhaps the effect of Miss Hale's elaborate and outspoken prose on her audience was what Ethel admired. Nevertheless, I cannot imagine that Ethel

would have approved of Sarah Hale's perspectives on all issues of the day. For example, during her time as a student at Newham College Cambridge, Sarah had been the bulwark of the Conservative Club (Montgomery 1997, p 40). Conversely, we know that Ethel was a burgeoning Socialist and viewed socialism as an extension of her Christian faith. Given these beliefs, it is likely that she and Sarah, who was a committed conservative, would have been staunch political rivals. Sarah Hale's values and opinions around the role of women differed markedly from Ethel Annakin's too, as Sarah showed her "disapproval of feminism in general and suffragettes in particular" (Ibid: 34). Conversely, Ethel espoused feminist ideals, and by 1913 had written a book called *The Feminist Movement*. Yet, interestingly, both women disapproved of the suffragettes, perhaps because of their tactics of civil disobedience.

Figure 5: Sarah Hale, Principal of Edge Hill College 1890-1920[5]

There were several clubs and societies at Edge Hill College, during the years Ethel was a student there, such as Pons Asinorum (study of literature), the French, Music, Science, and the Debating Society. The Debating Society regularly considered important political issues of the times and was the society that all students took part in. In 1894 the Debating Society voted 64 to 15 that the 'franchise should be extended to women' (Montgomery 1997: 34), evidence that the students at the college were more progressive in their views than the principal.

Notably from the College Magazine for 1900, 1901 and 1902, (Edge Hill Archive Catalogue EHU/PUB/3/1), the years Ethel studied here, her name is not mentioned in connection with any of these societies, or indeed any way whatsoever. In attempting to reconstruct the past through historiography (Denzin 2009 : 246), I find her absence, or her silence, from the college magazine curious, not least given her conspicuous support of the Rev Aked, when 'she stood and defended Aked in a church meeting at Pembroke Chapel when he was under fire for his stand against the Boer War' (Smith 2019 :7). I have yet to uncover any evidence to suggest reasons for Ethel's absence from the reporting of the college societies. In attempting to reconstruct possible reasons for her absence, perhaps we can assume

that she saw her teacher training and activities on issues of social justice as separate spheres of her life at that time? Perhaps too, given the expectations of middle-class educated women during this period, she was careful not to fuse these two elements of her life. Could it be possible that her activism, if widely known, may have influenced her chances of gaining employment as a respectable woman teacher? Alternatively, and an explanation I favour, could this period have been a period of awakening for Ethel, a period in which she would realise her aspirations as a feminist. During the early 1900's "women teachers' political activism was considerable" (Oram 1996: 13). The subjective experiences of some women teachers such as developing "a strong sense of self-hood, personal autonomy and agency" (Ibid: 23) may genuinely provide the right conditions for political activism. Furthermore, women were energised into activism and the women's movement "through personal contacts and social networks, as a result of propaganda, and in response to inspirational speakers and leaders and to the drama of militancy" (Banks 1986. :9, 68, 132-3, 139-41). Certainly, Ethel seems to have been motivated by inspirational leaders and speakers in Sarah Hale and the Rev Aked (see next section), who's social networks she became part of. Auspicious conditions for her burgeoning activism.

At Edge Hill College in 1900, every minute of every day was scheduled. The student timetables were so meticulously structured ensuring for example that no student was allowed out of college after 5pm. As a result, it is fascinating to find an example of Ethel's personal and political determination which comes from recollections of events by a past student. Mary Sheppard (EH 1909-11) recalled that a popular myth had it that 'Ethel Annnakin …. used to slip out at night and address meetings of dock labourers; if so, she was certainly adept at avoiding the Edge Hill security system!' (Montgomery 1997: 112).

In this scenario it may not take too much scrutiny to suggest that Ethel sneaked out of college to speak to the dock labourers about the importance of temperance, a cause worthy enough for her to feel she could break the rules.

A Fighting Parson for Social reform: The Importance of Methodism to Socialism and Feminism in Ethel's Life

Sundays were the only relatively free day for students at Edge Hill College; however they were required to attend church for at least one service and expectantly two. Miss Hale checked the students attendance at church through an 8pm roll call, those who had attended church twice were free to go but those who had been to church just once were asked to explain themselves (Montgomery 1997).

Around 1900 there were approximately 140 Churches within a mile of the College, 23 of these were Methodist churches (GENUKI, UK and Ireland Genealogy). Undoubtedly, the district of Edge Hill, was considered an attractive suburb of Liverpool, populated by merchants, teachers, and journalists, and so we would anticipate that Ethel would be drawn to the United Methodist Free Church on Durning Road itself, where the college was located. Attending this church, would have been in keeping with Ethel's upbringing and status as a trainee teacher. Yet, we know that Ethel didn't choose to attend a Primitive Methodist Church, but another non-conformist church, Pembroke Baptist Chapel. It seems curious that Ethel chose to walk 20 minutes, nearly a mile, to her preferred church, that is, until we realise the importance of the charismatic preacher of Pembroke Chapel the Revered Charles Aked. Sellers (1962) confirms that in Aked's congregation 'the student and apprentice element was particularly large and among them was a young student from Edge Hill Training College, Miss Ethel Annakin, the future Lady Snowdon' (Sellers 1962:221).

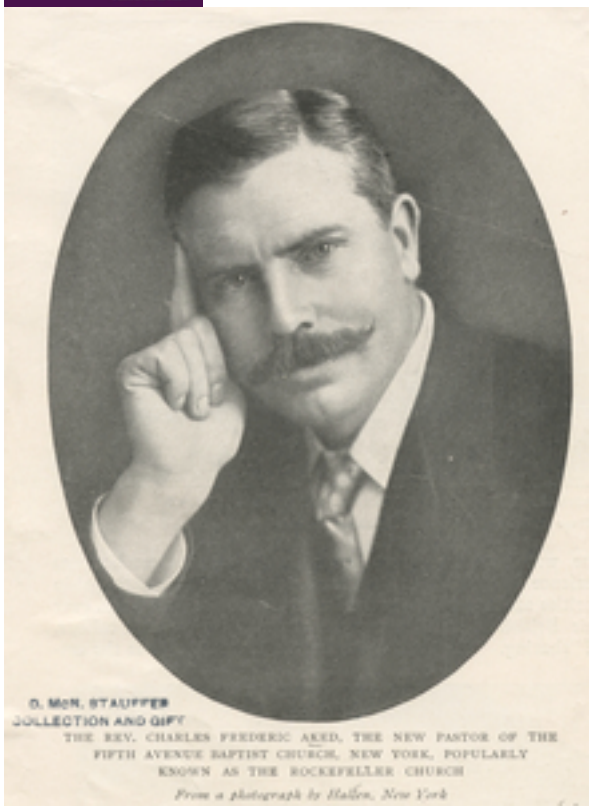

Figure 6: The Rev Charles Aked, circa 1907, when he took up the pastorship of the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, New York, popularly known as the Rockefeller Church[6]

Charles Frederic Aked (1864-1941) was an outspoken and often controversial non-conformist preacher, adamant in the belief that a Christian faith meant not just outwardly conforming to certain religious rituals but active engagement with social issues of concern, such as 'racial equality, women's suffrage, Christian unity and world peace' (Smith 2019: 3). The Rev Aked's fiery sermons were widely publicised locally, for example in the *Liverpool Mercury,* as well as being printed and sold on the street after worship (Smith 2019, p5). Interestingly the *Leeds Mercury*, one of the most notable penny daily provincial newspapers in England at that time, also carried news of Aked's sermons and endeavours.

Articles published in the *Leeds Mercury* confirms that the Rev C.F. Aked is mentioned 24 times in the years between 1891 and 1899. He was particularly prominent in the years 1895 and 1899, when news of Aked's preaching reached the editorial pages seven times in each year (Newspapers by Ancestry). Due to the extensive circulation of the *Leeds Mercury* in Yorkshire, it is particularly likely that Ethel would have been aware of the preaching's of the Rev Aked from her home in Harrogate. By the time Ethel attended Edge Hill College, Aked had been preaching in Liverpool for 10 years.

We do not know, and can only wonder, if Ethel saw Charles Aked address the anniversary meeting of the Leeds Council of Evangelical Free Churches in Leeds in November 1899 (Leeds Mercury, 24th April 1899, British Library), and how this may have influenced her. However, we know that Ethel did come to Edge Hill College a few months after that meeting. Perhaps she was attracted to Edge Hill College because of its non-denominational status mattered to her, or perhaps because of the straight-forward transport links from Harrogate to Liverpool, or maybe because of her admiration for the work of the Rev Aked who she knew preached in Liverpool. Then again, Ethel may have chosen to come to Liverpool for all three reasons!

Furthermore, Ethel was not merely a passive listener of Aked's sermons, she actively got involved in the life of the church, meeting and befriending the radical preacher, his wife and their family. Aked's '… thrilling voice and a pulpit technique which many considered hypnotic soon enabled Aked, ….to turn a hopelessly decaying down-town church into one of the most progressive and nourishing in Liverpool" (Sellers 1962: 220). He regularly attracted large crowds, to hear him preach, allegedly numbering more than a thousand on several occasions. He became renowned for being considered a 'fighting parson for social reform' (Smith 2019). Ethel, perhaps enthralled by Aked's oratory, became a Christian Socialist after listening to his sermon on 'Can a Man be a Christian on £1 a week?' This was also the title of a lecture by Keir Hardie (date unknown). She recalled 30 years later that this sermon by Dr Aked was the turning-point in her life:

> I felt my whole-body glow and palpitate with the glory of the new idea, the idea of salvation through service (Cross 1966: 61).

Between 1900-02 when Ethel attended Edge Hill College and Pembroke Chapel, her activism involved entering the slums of Liverpool to preach temperance. Pembroke Place, the area around the chapel, contained dense, highly populated slum housing. Locally it was called 'Little Hell' (Historic Liverpool). Many streets were no-go areas, because of the high rate of crime there, even policemen didn't like to go there after dark. I'm sure Miss Hale, had she known, would not have approved of any of her students visiting Pembroke Place.

Ethel's fervour for social reform was furthered by her hands on activities, demonstrating her radical nature. She did not believe in bourgeois correctness, as Miss Hale seemed to. Ethel believed that social reform could be achieved by humility and service and that the evils of intoxication from drinking alcohol could be eradicated by education and discipline.

Of relevance to Ethel's story is the nature of the temperance movement at the turn of the 20th century, specifically the fact that it encouraged groups of women to organise and cooperate on a large scale. For example, we know from newspaper reports of 1901 that the *British Women's Temperance Association* held their annual meeting at the Liverpool Town Hall on Tuesday 5th February 1901, the Rev Aked was present as were 'a numerous attendance of ladies' (The British Newspaper Archive, Liverpool Daily Post, 6th February 1901). It would be unlikely that Ethel would be able to attend a midweek meeting, given the strict routine established by her teacher training college, nevertheless, given Ethel's fundamental belief in temperance she would have known about this organisation and may even have been a member. Interestingly the annual meeting recorded the success of a temperance coffee cart (Fairfield Liverpool), which was so encouraging, 'as there were many other centres along the docks… that (coffee) carts could be advantageously employed' (ibid). This evidence suggests a link in Ethel's story. In the absence of hard facts to support the reasons why Ethel sneaked out of college, the acknowledgement of the subjective and interpretive nature of a life history approach here is seen as a strength (Munro1998). In reconstructing events, I suggest it is highly plausible for Ethel to sneak out of Edge Hill College to talk to dock workers, as reported by Mary Sheppard (: 49), to staff a coffee cart on the docks. Chatting with dockers about the evils of alcohol over a coffee cart would have been an opportunity that Ethel was likely to relish.

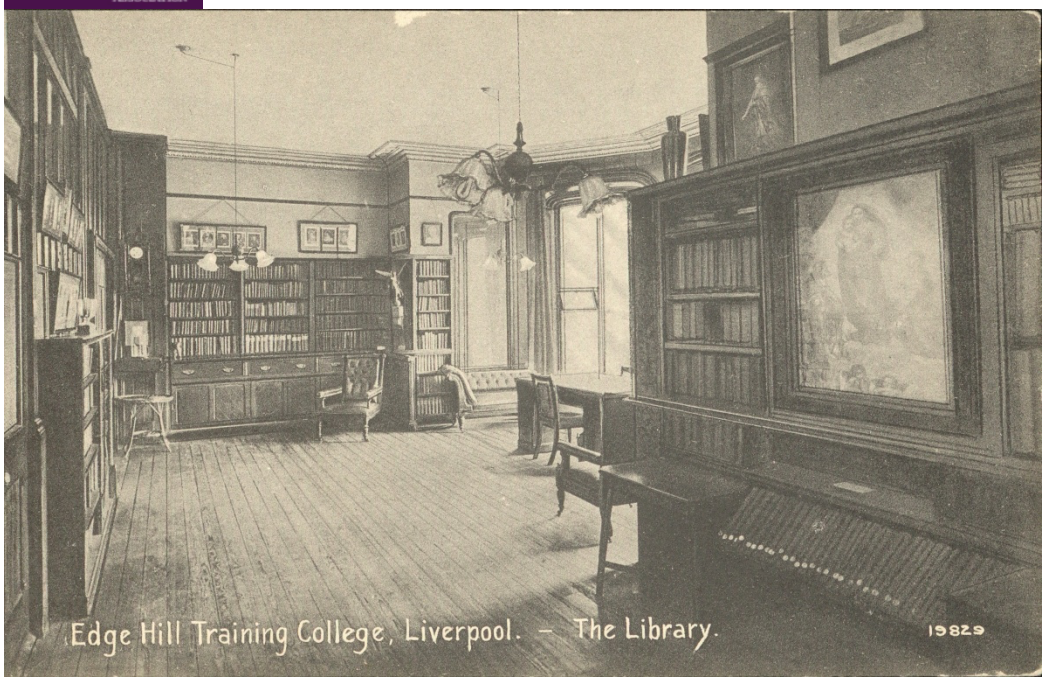

Figure 7: The Library, Edge Hill College, Durning Road, Liverpool, circa 1900. [7]

Political and Cultural Narrative

The issues that dominated politics in early 20th century Britain were Home Rule for Ireland and the fervour of imperialism, as the British Empire and the dominions continued to expand, particularly in Africa. Additionally rapid industrialisation and social change saw many philanthropists, such as George Cadbury, the chocolate manufacturer, pacifists and those opposing the Boer War (1899-1902), shift from supporting William Gladstone's Liberals to supporting the newly formed (but not yet elected) Labour Party (1893). Of relevance to this narrative were the events of the Boer War, which served to polarise views in domestic politics in a way that earlier wars did not.

The inhumane conditions that Boer women and children endured, including being taken from their land, having their livestock killed and being held captive by the British, was met by the UK public with growing horror. Both the Rev Aked and Ethel Annakin vehemently condemned the British involvement in holding the Boer population captive in refugee camps or 'concentration camps' as they became to be known (Smith 2007: 5). The conditions in the camps, resulted in a public outcry, after which the Government appointed an all-woman commission to investigate, which was unique at the time. This was led by Millicent Fawcett, leader of the largest movement for women's suffrage, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). In the autumn of 1901, the Fawcett Commission, as it became known, conducted a tour of the camps in South Africa, with devastating results for the Government. The Fawcett Commission's report became widespread public knowledge and would undoubtedly have provided evidence for arguments made by Rev Aked at Pembroke Chapel which were vocally supported by Ethel Annakin (Smith 2019).

It is of no-doubt that Ethel drew inspiration from the preaching of the Rev Aked and from her time in Liverpool. Perhaps the convergence of her beliefs in Primitive Methodism and Socialism, through a new form of Christian Socialism, reinforced in her a social activism which could be viewed as a zenith in her political zeal. From here the foundation and direction of her life's work flourished, as Ethel

realised in working for social change, she could convince an audience this was when she 'first recognized that 'she possessed the gift of eloquence' (Smith 2019, p 7).

By the time Ethel left Edge Hill College in 1902 she was rising to be the evocative human rights speaker and polemic writer she would become. Her incessant activities on behalf of the women's movement and for socialism meant that just five years later, in 1906, Ethel Snowden became a national speaker for the NUWSS. Yet before embarking on the rest of her career she had to be able to support herself economically and therefore would first seek employment as a schoolteacher.

Most trainees from Edge Hill College, Ethel included, secured teaching posts close to their homes. In this way Ethel's first teaching post was 17 miles from Harrogate at Hunslet (girls' school), Low Road, Leeds (1902). We know very little of her two years there, yet in the winter of 1903-4, there was a severe depression which was felt right across Yorkshire (Bradford, Leeds, and Nelson where Ethel taught) ; the schoolteachers in the poorer districts were in despair as they faced children pinched and emaciated through want of food' (Raw, 2006 – no page). Fred Jowett, Bradford councillor and later MP, who was a friend of Ethel and Philip Snowden, initiated an investigation, finding that 2,574 children were going hungry. Resultantly, by 1904 Bradford became the first town in the country to take responsibility for feeding school children.

In early 1904, Ethel took a post at Walverden School (mixed) in Nelson, Lancashire. Why Ethel moved from Yorkshire to Lancashire may be viewed through the lens of her activism, socialism and campaigning for teetotalism. For example, Walverden School was not far from Cowling, home of Philip Snowden, a prominent socialist writer and politician who earned a reputation as the 'prophet of the north' (Cross 1966: 79). By 1903 Ethel was a member of both the Leeds Women's Suffrage Society and the Yorkshire ILP (Independent Labour Party), moving in similar circles as Snowden. Their paths naturally crossed, leading Ethel to become a frequent visitor to Snowden's home.

1903 – "The New Disciple"

After Ethel's public speaking debut at Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool (1901-2), she would deliver her first public lecture for the Yorkshire ILP at Keighley in September 1903. Indeed, she created quite an impact on the ILP in Yorkshire, an original and brilliant speaker, her eloquent delivery, and dramatic oratory added to the aura around her. Perhaps too it was her perceived distinctiveness that drew audiences, as some began to question how a girl from an 'exclusive place' like Harrogate, a 'cut above' the mill towns, be a socialist? (Cross 1966: 61).

The Labour Leader, a publication edited and owned by Keir Hardy, later reported –

> "… the West Riding weather was at its worst, yet still the audience were prepared to trudge through the pouring rain to hear Ethel speak. Despite, the discomfort of damp clothing, the audience seemed spellbound with Ethel's personality, as 'the new disciple' (Cross 1966 : 61) talked politics."

From her solid Liberal teacher education at Edge Hill College, and her burgeoning activities for suffrage and socialism, Ethel Anakin's formative years embedded in her an unwavering conviction. From here her rhetoric and writing became forged and fermented. Her formative experiences shaped her as a dynamic speaker, a formidable writer and the significant human rights activist she would become.

To conclude, I reflect on the Life History approach, which is exceedingly useful in beginning to unravel Ethel Snowden's early life (1881-1903), much of which is undocumented and open to interpretation. Before her death in 1951 Ethel destroyed all her personal correspondence, maybe because of how it might be used or perceived by history. Clearly Ethel's voice and the "voice of teachers as an occupational group … has historically been marginalized" (Sparkes 1994: 165). Therefore, this narrative suggests an uncovering of a marginalized voice, as a woman training to be a teacher in 1900, with all its inconsistencies and silences. For example, it is difficult to understand why there is no evidence of Ethel's personal 'voice' within the surviving documents in Edge Hill University archive for the period 1900-02. These omissions have given me as a researcher the opportunity to reflect, to suggest meaningful connections, such as the reason for Ethel's evening visit(s) to the docks, bearing in mind her powerful belief in social justice alongside the social and political context of her early life. Clearly, my stance as a lecturer and researcher at Edge Hill University had a bearing on how I seek to tell Ethel's story too. Importantly, I find I am motivated to find out more, because I too was bought up in a non-conformist faith, and my belief in socialism and social justice are relevant to my perspective too. I trust other scholars using the Life History approach would do well to consider how the researchers' identities align with this method. As I continue to delve into Ethel's story, the subjective nature of a life history approach is I believe a huge advantage.

I wonder where her story will take us next.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the archivist, Dan Copley and his team, at Edge Hill University archive for their guidance and support in searching and locating resources and for reading earlier drafts of this article. Thanks also to Prof Alyson Brown of Edge Hill University for her unwavering support and feedback on earlier drafts of this piece.

Funding

The author did not receive any funding for this piece.

Notes

1. Photo Courtesy of Edge Hill University Archive.
2. Photo Courtesy of Edge Hill University Archive.
3. Photo Courtesy of Edge Hill University Archive.
4. Photo Courtesy of Edge Hill University Archive.
5. Photo Courtesy of Edge Hill University Archive.
6. Image Courtesy of The New York Public Library, Digital Collections. Available at: https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dc-3e1c-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99. Accessed March 2025.
7. Photo Courtesy of Edge Hill University Archive.

References

Banks O (1986) Becoming *a Feminist: The Social Origins of First Wave Feminism.* Brighton: Wheatsheaf.

Bebbington D W (2014) The nonconformist conscience (Vol. 19). Routledge.

Britannica – Christian Socialism
https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christian-Socialism. Accessed March 2024.

Britanica - Congregationalism
https://www.britannica.com/topic/Congregationalism. Accessed February 2025.
British Library Newspapers, digitised *Leeds Mercury* from 3 January 1807 to 1900. https://www.newspapers.com/. Accessed March 2024.
British Newspaper Archive
https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000647/19010206/044/0002
Accessed July 2024.
Copeland J (2007) Millicent Garrett Fawcett. *History Review*, 58:36.
Cross C (1966) Philip *Snowden.* Barrie and Rockliff: London.
Crossland J (2023) *The rise of devils: fear and the origins of modern terrorism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Crossland J. Anarchists, Fenians, Nihilists!: London and the First 'Age of Terror' 1867 – 1909. Talk for the Historical Association 11th June 2024.
https://www.history.org.uk/events/calendar/8692/anarchists-fenians-nihilists-london-and the-fi Accessed April 2024.
de Bellaigue C (2018) Charlotte Mason, home education and the Parents' National Educational Union in the late nineteenth century. *Oxford Review of Education* 41(4): 501-507. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24736475
Denzin N K (2009) *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods.* London: Routledge.
Edge Hill University Archive Catalogue: Edge Hill College Magazine, 1892-1964 https://archives.edgehill.ac.uk/records/EHU/PUB/3/1 Accessed February 2025.
Edge Hill Training College Directory, 1885-1905, c. 1905 https://archives.edgehill.ac.uk/records/EHU/PUB/4/1 Accessed February 2025
Edge Hill College Register of Students, 1895-1900 https://archives.edgehill.ac.uk/records/EHU/STU/1/1. Accessed February 2025.
GENUKI UK and Ireland Genealogy https://www.genuki.org.uk/#:~:text=GENUKI%20provides%20a%20virtual%20reference,and%20a%20group%20of%20volunteers Accessed March 2023.
Gehrke J P (2016) A Radical Endeavor: Joseph Chamberlain and the Emergence of Municipal Socialism in Birmingham. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 75(1): 23–57.
Hansen S (2009) The Identification of 'Radicals' in the British Press, 1889-1914. http://wwwbiz.meijo-u.ac.jp/SEBM/ronso/no10_1/03_HANSEN.pdf. Accessed February 2025
Harris J (1992) Political thought and the welfare state 1870–1940: An intellectual framework for British social policy. *Past & Present*, 135(1): 116-141.
Historic Liverpool https://historic-liverpool.co.uk/dark-heritage-pembroke-place-documents-archaeology/ Accessed March 2023.
Jenkins G (2010) Nationalism and sectarian violence in Liverpool and Belfast, 1880s–1920s. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 78(1): 164-180.
Johnson M (2016) *The National Politics and Politicians of Primitive Methodism: 1886-1922.* PhD thesis university of Hull. https://hull-repository.worktribe.com/preview/4219580/content-hull_15456a.pdf. Accessed July 2024.

Jones A (2016) *Powers of the press: newspapers, power and the public in nineteenth-century England*. Oxon: Routledge.

Kay J B and Mendes K (2020) Gender, Media and Protest: Changing Representations of the Suffragette Emily Wilding Davison in British Newspapers, 1913–2013. *Media History*, 26(2): 137-152.

Munro P (1998) Subject *to Fiction: Women Teachers' Life History Narratives and the Cultural Politics of Resistance*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Montgomery F (1997) *Edge Hill University College: a history 1885–1997.* Chichester: Phillimore.

My Primitive Methodists. The Amazing Annakin's of 'Arrogate. https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/content/people-2/family-history/the_amazing_annakins_of_arrogate Accessed July 2023.

My Primitive Methodists. Snowden, Ethel, nee Annakin (1881-1951). https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/content/people-2/lay-people/surnames-beginning-with-s/snowden-ethel-nee-annakin-1881-1951 Accessed April 2024.

Newspapers.Com by Ancestry https://www.newspapers.com/ Accessed March 2023.

Oram A M (1996) *Women teachers in state schools in England and Wales 1900-1939: The development of feminist allegiance and political strategies* (Doctoral dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science). https://etheses.lse.ac.uk/1395/1/U079637.pdf Accessed February 2025.

Oxford Reference. The Labour Party owes more to Methodism than to Marxism. Morgan Phillips 1902–63 British Labour politician: James Callaghan *Time and Chance* (1987); coined by Denis Healey as speechwriter for Phillips at the Socialist International Conference, Copenhagen, 1953https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00008440;jsessionid=7712A3D22D958AE8C483D04B8F283291 Accessed march 2023.

Raw D (2006) *Bradford Pals*. Pen and Sword.

Purvis J. Unladylike Behaviour. The Guardian, Tue 13 Nov 2007. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2007/nov/13/research.highereducation

Purvis J (2003) *Emmeline Pankhurst: a biography*. Routledge.

Scotland N (1997) Methodism and the English Labour movement 1800-1906. *Anvil*, 14(1): 36-48. https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/anvil/14-1_036.pdf Accessed March 2023.

Sellers I (1962) *Nonconformist Attitudes in Later Nineteenth-century Liverpool. Society*. https://www.hslc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/114-11-Sellers.pdf Accessed March 2025.

Smith K E (2019) 'A Fighting Parson for Social Reform, *Baptist Quarterly*, 50(1): 3-18.

Snowden E (1907) The *Woman Socialist*, G. Allen (courtesy of Keighley Library).

Snowden E (1913) *The Feminist Movement*. Leopold Classic Library.

Sparkes AC (1994) Life histories and the issue of voice: reflections on an emerging relationship, *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 7(2):165-183/

Sutherland P (2013) Sectarianism and evangelicalism in Birmingham and Liverpool, 1850–2010. In: Wolffe (ed) *Protestant-Catholic Conflict from the Reformation to the Twenty-first Century: The Dynamics of Religious Difference*, p: 132-165). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

The British Library Newspapers 1800 -1900 Edge Hill University Library https://go-gale-com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/ps/start.do?p=BNCN&u=edge

Women's Suffrage, History and citizenship resources for schools
https://www.suffrageresources.org.uk/resource/3231/suffrage-societies-database-guide
Accessed July 2024.

Author Biography

Christine Lewis PhD was a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Edge Hill University for 17 years, prior to this she was a Secondary School History teacher. Christine's research interests include autobiography/autoethnography and life history/story approaches.