

The Walk for Women - July 2013

Contributed by Phillipa Malins

100 years ago this summer, 50,000 women from all over Britain walked to London and converged on Hyde Park, to demonstrate for the right to vote. It was called The Great Pilgrimage for Women's Suffrage and was organised by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, (the NUWSS), or the Suffragists, the non militant arm of the suffrage movement. 'The Common Cause', their official newspaper, published routes to London from all parts of the country, some requiring up to a fortnight's march.

Edith Bevan, who lived at Horsgate House in Cuckfield, was the Secretary and Treasurer of the CSWSS as well as Secretary of the Cuckfield branch. This was why the Sussex route came through Cuckfield and many of the Pilgrims would have spent the night at Horsgate. Our photo shows them in the High Street, setting off again in pouring rain on July 22nd. The Mid Sussex Times reported that many Cuckfield residents accompanied them for a short distance despite the wet weather.



The pilgrims through Cuckfield, 1913



Today's pilgrims in Cuckfield churchyard

This year, author and activist Lucy-Anne Holmes decided to set up The Walk for Women, a series of walks throughout the summer to remember the vision of those earlier women. On July 21st, Lucy and her companions set off from Brighton, arriving in Cuckfield on the 22nd, 100 years later to the day.

Our photo shows Lucy on the left and Maire McQueeney, the route organiser, centre, with fellow pilgrims in Cuckfield churchyard. In Lucy-Anne Holmes' words: 'Let's celebrate those women and all they did for our rights and freedom, but also think about the changing role of women over the last 100 years. Those women walked with a dream, to imagine future generations free. Let's do the same'.



The pilgrims in the Museum



Pilgrims outside Horsgate House

The Modern Day Pilgrims visited the Museum to look at our Votes for Women sash in the Suffragette (the militant wing of the Suffrage movement) colours of white, purple and green and photos of Edith Bevan and Horsgate House.

Edith had trained as a nurse and later nursed as a VAD in the hospital established in the Queen's Hall during WWI.

Volunteers walked with the visitors over the fields to Horsgate House, following the route of the original Pilgrims, before seeing them on their way to London.

Their journey ended with a rally at Hyde Park on July 27th where they met up with walkers from all parts of Britain, all there to remember The Pilgrims of 1913 and the part they played in the granting of votes for women. Limited suffrage was granted to women in 1918 and universal suffrage in 1928.

More information on the Sussex Suffragists can be found in the publication 'The Sussex Suffragists' by Frances Stenlake.