

Research Project

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My project is based around the suffragette Dora Thewlis (1890-1976). I chose this topic as I find personal stories behind large historical events interesting; I chose Dora's story because she is little-known and I think it's important to showcase the stories of all those who helped achieve women's enfranchisement.

I have written a free verse poem with the aim of eliciting an emotional response which will help the reader empathise with Dora's story. The poem focuses on three main events in Dora's life: the Women's Parliament march, her time in prison and her decision to emigrate.

Dora was born in a poor area in Huddersfield to strong socialist parents - her circumstances meant she had to work in the mills from a young age. Dora taught herself to read newspapers and was politically aware.

Dora joined her local WSPU and in 1907, after the second reading of the Women's Enfranchisement Bill was talked out (debate over the bill ran over so a vote couldn't take place), Dora, with hundreds of protestors, stormed the Houses of Parliament. They faced over 500 policemen, and over 70 were arrested - the youngest being Dora. While on trial Dora was ridiculed by the magistrate Horace Smith, and the press dubbed her the 'Baby Suffragette'. Though not found guilty of any offences, Dora was given solitary confinement at Holloway prison for almost a week. Back home, she continued to receive negative attention from the press creating a strained relationship between the WSPU and the Thewlis's. This reached breaking point when Dora's sister Eliza claimed to have been the key leading figure in the local suffragette movement. In search of a better life Dora, and her sister Evelyn, immigrated to Australia. Dora's grandchildren say that she maintained her strong character and political opinions into old age.

The March

A haze of smoke edged my vision
as I took that first step off the train,
The journey has been long,
But not as hard as the one,
We faced every day to stay alive,
And here,
With this step,
Another journey began,
A journey to rights and freedom,
And life,
A journey to have our voices heard,
To prove we were people,
Equal,
To those who ruled us,
Those who knew so little,
Of who we really were.

There were hundreds of us there,
That day,
Our minds filled,
And filling each other's,
With that sense of purpose,
Of power,
Of might,
From that possibility,
That reason we were here,
That we could be the ones,
To change the direction,
The flow of society,
To one of opportunity,
To those who really wanted it,
The hard workers,
Not just those,
Who were handed their life,
On a golden platter,
And so we marched on.

That day,
I feel,
The haze of trains never left my vision,
But evolved,
The world edged with gold,

A clarity given by purpose,
Togetherness,
And then,
With the end in sight,
Where we had come,
To do what had to be done,
There the haze,
Once again,
Changed form,
The storm clouds,
Of opposition,
Obscuring my vision,
Extinguishing that power,
I had so recently felt,
But I fought on,
What else could I do?
Harnessing the belief,
That I was in the right,
I charged towards,
Those five hundred men,
Batons raised,
The reality,
The embodiment,
Of the struggle we faced.

But then,
The blackness engulfed me,
Completely,
The power of privilege,
Pinned down one so endlessly
encumbered,
With the restrictions of society,
And I was hauled off,
To face my fate,
Alone.

Incarceration

My thoughts echo,
Around,
These four walls,
I now call,
My home,
I'm beginning to feel,
As though I may,
Never,
Leave these few days,
Stretching,
Into years,
Decades,
Centuries,
Inside my mind,
This time,
With no one but,
Myself,
Forces my doubts,
And fears,
To the centre of my world.

What was all this for,
Really?
What use did my stand,
Really have?
Against those vultures,
Of the press,
That patronising magistrate,
Who spun,
My story,
My life,
Into some,
Nightmarish,
Fairy tale,
Into what my people do,
Snatch babes from their cradles,
And create strong women,
With voices,
Opinions,
And a thirst for justice,
Everything the world,
Seems so determined,

To eradicate,
What good has it done?
Other than push me,
It seems,
To the brink of death.

But no,
I will escape,
This torture chamber,
That magnifies the shadows,
Stirring in my head,
I have fought,
That much is evident,
I will keep on fighting,
For my cause,
For my freedom,
Until,
I can fight,
No more.

New Life

So here I am,
Back where I started,
Whilst the cause,
I pledged my life to,
Grows ever stronger,
The tide,
I am sure,
Is soon to turn their way,
And yet,
This societal revolution,
Seems to have deemed it fit,
To carry on,
Without me,
Any praise for,
Anything,
I may have done,
To propel the cause,
Through turbulent waters,
Is forgotten,
I have become an,
Outcast,
For a mistake,
Made,
By another.

So now,
I feel,
I must forge a path ahead,
Move on from this land,
That has never looked,
Too kindly upon me,
Yet shaped me,
Into who I am,
Today.

I shall take my promise,
I made to myself,
In this chapter of my life,
To keep on fighting,
For what I believe in,
To never give up,
Even when all seems against you,

And I'll take it,
Away,
To some other cause,
That I can help,
Striving always,
To make the world,
A better place.