

JESSIE & LOUISA BOUCHERETT: LIFELONG CAMPAIGNERS

These remarkable sisters used their wealth and status to transform individual lives and society at large. From the Caistor Workhouse in 1861 to the suffrage societies of 1866 to Parliament Square in 2018, their influence endures.

The Boucherett family played a prominent role in Lincolnshire life and politics from the 1700s, residing at Stallingborough Manor House and then Willingham House. Louisa and Jessie were two of five children born to Ayscough Boucherett and Louisa Pigou in the 1820s. Of the family's three sons, two died in childhood (Ayscough and Hugo) while the third, Henry, died unexpectedly in 1877 before he was married or had children. This meant the family estate passed to Louisa as the eldest daughter, along with a higher profile and new responsibilities.

LOUISA BOUCHERETT (1821–1896)

Being unmarried herself, Louisa retained control of her estates and business interests. If she had been married she could have lost control of her property to her husband, due to the common law practice of *coverture* which, if strictly applied, curtailed women's access to their own money and resources.

Louisa ran the Boucherett estates and assumed a leading role in the local community. She developed a particular interest in the Caistor Union Workhouse, continuing her family's longstanding patronage of this institution, while becoming a regular visitor through her membership of The Workhouse Visiting Society (set-up to monitor and improve the conditions and care of workhouse inmates). Concerned by the plight of young children living in the harsh workhouse regime, Louisa pioneered a system of 'boarding out' children to local families, vetted and supervised by herself. The system of boarding out was a forerunner of the concept of foster care. Watch the video on this website for a dramatisation of this part of Louisa Boucherett's life.

During the 1860s Louisa also devoted her time and energy to the development and improvement of the standard of nursing at the

Lincoln Hospital. As a founder member of the Ladies Nursing Fund she worked to raise funds and improve the physical conditions under which the nurses laboured. It was a role that led to her seeking the advice and support of Florence Nightingale. Like Nightingale, Louisa believed that administrative efficiency and a clear, enforced chain of command were just as important as medical training. Building on the experience she gained at Lincoln, Louisa went on to advise other groups of hospital trustees around the country, including the Leicester Infirmary.

Louisa was an active member of the Primrose League, an organisation set up in 1883 by the Conservative Party to promote its values. Louisa organised local meetings, some of which were held in the grounds of Willingham Hall. Conservative women generally believed in working with men to advance the Women's Suffrage and other causes that focused on women's interests.

Louisa was also a talented artist. She undertook a grand tour of Europe and Egypt, travelling with two artist friends, sightseeing and painting as they travelled.



Gail Dennis of the Lindsey Rural Players appearing as Louisa in the video "Louisa Boucherett and the Caistor Workhouse Children" (6)

Children at the Crumpsall Workhouse
C.1897 (Manchester Archives) (7)



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JESSIE BOUCHERETT (1825–1905)

Emilia 'Jessie' Boucherett was the youngest daughter in the family and was educated at home until her teens, when she attended the Avonbank School in Stratford-upon-Avon.

The curriculum there exposed her to a broad range of women writers of the day. Being the daughter of a prominent landowning family, Jessie received several bequests, so she was able to live independently and pursue her political and social interests, including many causes.

In 1859 Jessie introduced herself to the editors of the English Woman's Journal. This was her entry into a world of like-minded women, campaigning for change. She contributed articles regularly, discussing pressing social and women's issues of the day, including the millions of women supporting themselves but trapped in poverty due to the lack of employment opportunities. In the same year, Jessie founded the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, which aimed to bring about social change and to address, in a practical way, the causes of disadvantage. The society provided classes and apprenticeships to introduce women into previously all-male occupations, such as book-keeping, hairdressing, pharmacy, and printing, among many others.

"the tradesman's daughter, who writes well and is quick at accounts, will be more useful in her father's shop, or better able to get a situation elsewhere, than another who writes ill and does accounts wrong, but has some knowledge of French and a notion of painting in water-colours and playing on the pianoforte."

Hints on Self-help: A Book for Young Women
by Emilia J. Boucherett

Jessie and her circle became involved in actively campaigning for women to be given the vote. In 1866 she financed the petition presented to Parliament by John Stuart Mill and played a role in drafting the document. The informal committee behind that petition developed into an organised campaign for the vote, initially developing into local suffrage societies then eventually forming the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). From 1866 these societies campaigned peacefully for

the vote. With the division of the movement and the advent of the Suffragettes (advocating direct action in the early 1900s) the NUWSS became known as Suffragists, continuing their peaceful campaigning.

Jessie also formed the Freedom of Labour Defence Association with Helen Blackburn in 1899 to protect women workers from restrictive legislation. Jessie continued to write, contributing to journals, publishing books and founding and editing her own journal, *The Englishwoman's Review*, in 1866.

In 1895 Louisa Boucherett died and Jessie inherited the family estates. For the next 10 years, Jessie ran her estates in Lincolnshire and continued her work nationally until her death in 1905.

THE PATH TO PARLIAMENT SQUARE, 2018

Both sisters took an active interest in politics and the suffrage movement and were members of the Langham Place Group of women, a group that also counted George Eliot and Millicent Fawcett as members. The group paved the way for the NUWSS which has become The Fawcett Society today. In April 2018, a statue of Millicent Fawcett (by artist Gillian Wearing) was unveiled in Parliament Square London, following a campaign by the feminist writer and activist Caroline Criado Perez. There are currently 12 statues in Parliament Square, Millicent Fawcett is the first woman afforded this honour. The statue is holding a banner that reads, "Courage calls to courage everywhere", a line from her speech following the death of activist Emily Davison, trampled by the King's horse at the Epsom Derby of 1913.

THE SISTERS' FINAL RESTING PLACE

The graves of Jessie and Louisa can be found in the churchyard at St Thomas, North Willingham. The family have historical ties with the building, reconstructing the church in 1777 in the Georgian Classical style of the time. The Walesby Churches' website includes more on the history of Jessie Boucherett:

<https://www.walesbychurches.org/st-thomas-willingham-history.html>



Jessie Boucherett (2)



The graves of Jessie and Louisa Boucherett at St Thomas's Church, North Willingham (3)

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THE HOUSE OF BOUCHERETT

The Boucherett family played an important role in local political life for several generations. Two members of the Boucherett Family held the post of High Sheriff of Lincolnshire and the High Steward of Grimsby. The second Ayscough Boucherett (Jessie and Louisa's paternal grandfather) was responsible for developing the new harbour in Grimsby, helping transform it into a significant port. Between 1796 and 1803 he was also Grimsby's MP. The family played a role in De Aston School, Market Rasen's cottage hospital and other local organisations, and had a hereditary patronage of Caistor Grammar School and roles on the board of the Caistor Union.

Willingham Woods, where the Boucherett family home used to stand before it was demolished in 1967, is now a popular public woodland with various trails to follow. There is a large car park and picnic site with a café and toilets in the adjacent layby.

<https://www.forestryengland.uk/willingham-woods>

<https://www.willinghamwoods.com/>

Willingham House, North Willingham (demolished 1967), this area is now part of Willingham Woods (1)



↓ The legacy today: The Fawcett Society and Futures for Women charities (4)



“THE FORGOTTEN SUFFRAGETTE” RADIO PLAY

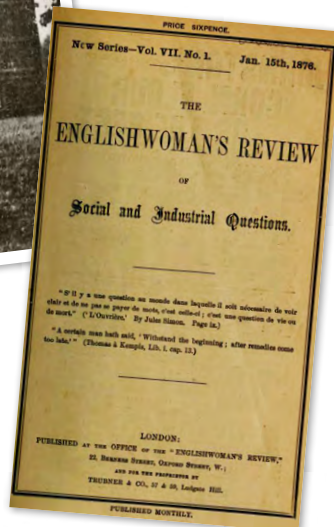
A dramatization of Jessie Boucherett's life, 'The Forgotten Suffragette' was broadcast on BBC Radio Lincolnshire and can be listened to here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p039wqk>

THE LEGACY TODAY: THE FAWCETT SOCIETY AND ‘FUTURES FOR WOMEN’

The NUWSS was renamed the Fawcett Society in honour of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, a charity registered in England. Now in its 150th year, the Fawcett Society continues to have an unrivalled influence on those in power, campaigning across the political spectrum to ensure that women are empowered to shape their own lives at home, in work and in public life. Visit their website: www.fawcettsociety.org.uk

The Society for Promoting the Employment of Women also still operates today as a charity registered in England known as Futures for Women. Futures for Women continue to support women to access employment opportunities. Visit their website: www.futuresforwomen.org.uk

The Englishwoman's Review was founded in January 1866 by Jessie and she became its first editor (5)



References

Jessie Boucherett; original story created by members of the Lincoln Branch of the Fawcett Society for an Exhibition at North Willingham Church celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the Society. Story updated in 2018.

Louisa Boucherett; original story created by Dr Caroline Mogg, for the Wolds Women of Influence Exhibition in 2018, based on her own original PhD research.

Prime sources: Ellen Jordan & Anne Bridger; (2006), Women's History Review, 15:3, 385-412, Ellen Jordan & Anne Bridger; 'Timely Assistance', (2009) and Elizabeth Crawford (2001) Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, Routledge. Grant, J.W. 'In the Steps of Exceptional Women'. Futures for Women, Dr Anne Bridger; North Willingham PCC, Market Rasen and Caistor Libraries and Rase Heritage Society.

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Photography credits

- 1) Willingham House https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Willingham_House,_Lincolnshire.jpg#/media/File:Willingham_House,_Lincolnshire.jpg
- 2) Jessie Boucherett - Miss Becker's Illustration (after a photograph about 1860) Contained within the book 'Record of Women's Suffrage, A record of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the British Isles, by Helen Blackburn, 1902' Private Collection, A. Wilson.
- 3) St Thomas's Church, Ashley Taylor; Push Creativity
- 4) The Fawcett Society and Futures for Women logos reproduced with kind permission
- 5) Women's History Review, 15:3, 385-412 (Google Books)
- 6) Gail Dennis of the Lindsey Rural Players (volunteer actor) / Ashley Taylor; Push Creativity (photographer)
- 7) Manchester Archives <https://www.flickr.com/photos/manchesterarchiveplus/14650949224/in/album-72157645633912066/>