On 2 May 1913, Emmeline Pankhurst – having recently been released from prison under the so-called ‘Cat and Mouse’ Act (Prisoners’ Temporary Discharge for Ill Health Act) – took refuge in Hook Heath in Surrey, at a house called Coign, belonging to Ethel Smyth. Three years previously, Smyth, when at the height of her success as a musical composer (she was the first, and for well over a century the only, female composer to have a work presented at New York’s Metropolitan Opera), had promised service to the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). Accordingly, her home had often been a site of suffragette activity. On this occasion, the police had followed Pankhurst all the way to Coign and surrounded the house, keeping watch in case she attempted to escape.¹ Pankhurst had to remain indoors and forbade Smyth from any contact with the officers, Smyth having suggested offering them umbrellas to shelter from the rain. Hiding in the bushes, their location was routinely given away by Smyth’s affectionate dog. Over three weeks later on 26 May, Pankhurst, desperate for an end to being cooped up at Coign and frustrated that she was unable to engage with the suffragette movement, attempted to leave in order to make an appearance at the WSPU meeting at the London Pavilion that day. She sent for a car, but upon emerging from Smyth’s house, she found herself to be, in her own words, ‘in a weak state, much weaker than I had imagined ... I exhausted the last remnant of my strength and sank fainting in the arms of my friends’.² She was promptly arrested and was taken by the police to Bow Street police station.³ A famous photograph shows Pankhurst being rearrested by two detectives outside Coign; the house stands as an emblem of the convergence of Smyth’s local presence and her national activism. <image near here>

Caption: Pankhurst being arrested at Smyth’s house / May 1913 / Museum of London

This article contributes to a greater understanding of Smyth and her music through the dual lenses of local history and women’s history. It explores the intersections between her regional activity in the Frimley and Woking areas, her musical career, and her service to the suffragette movement.
Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944), musician, author, keen sportsperson, and onetime leading suffragette, tends to be remembered by history primarily for her contribution to the profession of music composition. Yet, arguably, Smyth’s most important contribution to history lay neither in music nor in literature, but in politics. Here she channelled the militancy and determination to succeed in a fiercely patriarchal environment that she had shown throughout her compositional career, foreshadowing the refusal to capitulate to circumstances beyond her control that was subsequently to lead her to develop a parallel career as a writer. Having attained success as an artist within a strikingly male-dominated field, she was to turn her attention to the national campaign for equality of the sexes, paving the way for her later literary activity as a polemicist, notably in her essay collection *Female Pipings in Eden* (1933) in which her feminist voice is most overtly expressed.

Smyth’s musical achievements are remarkable, given that there was no tradition of women composers during her day. Her output includes six operas, produced in Continental Europe as well as in England and the USA, together with other large-scale works. These include her Serenade in D (1890), Overture to Shakespeare’s ‘Antony and Cleopatra’ (1890), Mass in D (1891), Concerto for Violin, Horn, and Orchestra (1927), and her oratorio *The Prison* (1929–30), in addition to sundry vocal, chamber, and solo keyboard pieces. This work-list, and the performances Smyth’s music received internationally during her lifetime, constitute an impressive output given that she was active at a time during which Britain did not nurture composers of the first rank (it had gained an unflattering reputation on the Continent as the ‘Land ohne Musik’). This led Smyth to relocate to Germany to train in music composition at the Leipzig Conservatorium in 1877 and to remain there for over a decade before returning to her native country.

Operating within a fiercely male-dominated profession, Smyth faced significant prejudice on grounds of gender, which had lasting effects on the reception of her works. In his capacity as music critic, George Bernard Shaw repeatedly discussed Smyth’s pieces in gendered terms. He famously remarked of a performance in 1892 that ‘When E.M. Smyth’s heroically brassy overture...
to [Shakespeare’s] Antony and Cleopatra was finished, and the composer called to the platform, it was observed with stupefaction that all that tremendous noise had been made by a lady’, and wrote to Smyth following the 1924 revival of her Mass in D that ‘It was your music that cured me for ever of the old delusion that women could not do man’s work in art and all other things’. J.A. Fuller Maitland’s evaluation of Smyth’s Mass in D in Grove’s Dictionary, the standard English-language reference work in the discipline of music, was that ‘The most striking thing about it was the entire absence of the qualities that are usually associated with feminine productions; throughout it was virile, masterly in construction and workmanship’. This appraisal was reproduced near-verbatim in subsequent editions and hence retained currency for some fifty years. Even in the case of her earliest mature works such as her Violin Sonata (1887), Smyth retrospectively recalled finding that ‘the critics unanimously said it was devoid of feminine charm and therefore unworthy [of] a woman – the good old remark I was so often to hear again’. Elsewhere, she related Brahms’s belief that her ‘so-called Smyth manuscripts’ were obviously the work of a male composer, remarking that ‘I fancy nothing would have induced him to believe that women might, could, would, or should ever be taken seriously’.

In her later years, Smyth experienced hearing problems sufficiently severe to have compromised her ability to sustain her career as composer, musician, and conductor. Rather than admit defeat, with inimitable resilience she instead turned her attentions increasingly to developing a secondary career as a writer, publishing a total of ten books in the last twenty-five years of her life. Several offer an unbroken series of chronological memoirs; others represent essay collections comprising a judicious mix of autobiographical episodes, biographical sketches, and polemics on the music profession and the status of women within it. Thus Smyth continued to raise awareness of her music, as well as of the obstacles she had encountered as a female composer, not through writing new music but by using her literary works to discuss her experiences of the closed coterie of the elite musical patriarchy to whom she referred variously by names such as the Machine, the Inner Circle, the Group, and the Elders.
Smyth’s Surrey residences

Smyth’s Surrey connections both influenced her music and provided the local dimension to her suffrage activism. Her earliest years were spent at Sidcup Place, Sidcup, then part of Kent but now part of Greater London. Thereafter, excepting her relocation to Germany for twelve years from 1877 onwards, her life may be entirely accounted for in the three properties in which she resided in the county of Surrey: Frimhurst followed by One Oak, both in the area now known as Surrey Heath; and Coign in Hook Heath, near Woking.

Frimhurst, Frimley Green

In 1867, Smyth’s family moved from Sidcup to Frimhurst, Frimley Green, a house set in several acres of farmland. The relocation was prompted by the circumstances of Smyth’s father John H. Smyth, a British military officer who had served much of his career in India. In her earliest published book of memoirs, Impressions that Remained (1919), Smyth described Frimley as ‘originally a few straggling cottages on the verge of a big stretch of heather-land’, prior to the establishment of the garrison at Aldershot; at their end, she recalled that it remained little more than ‘a few houses grouped about a village green’. The military connection was crucial to Smyth’s formative musical training, since her first formal tutor, Alexander Ewing, composer of the hymn ‘Jerusalem the Golden’, had been stationed in Aldershot as a member of the Army Service Corps. Initially, Smyth’s family rented Frimhurst, before buying it upon her father’s discharge from the British army with a generous pension in 1872. He subsequently enlarged the grounds, purchasing land from the Basingstoke Canal Navigation company in 1874, and developed an interest in farming thereafter, keeping cows, chickens, and more horses as well as growing crops. Smyth described him as somebody who ‘threw himself into count[r]y work, with an energy and thoroughness which has remained a tradition in that part of Surrey’.

Smyth’s first biographer, Christopher St John, was of the opinion that she held Sidcup Place to be the ‘more attractive’ of her two childhood homes and the one that she liked better.
Nonetheless, it was Frimhurst that received more extensive discussion in her autobiographical writing, even if she considered it to be a ‘commonplace but very comfortable house’ as against her ‘poetical’ memory of Sidcup.\textsuperscript{15} She described Frimhurst’s distinctive entrance where the railway passes under the canal, the site where she had recklessly thrown stones at passing trains as a child until complaints from the South-Western Railway company prompted her father to refer the matter to the police, who drew his attention to the young perpetrator.

Upon her move to Continental Europe, Frimhurst remained Smyth’s permanent base. She would return periodically in accordance with the agreement made with her father, who had understandably been extremely reluctant to allow his daughter to move to Germany to train. He capitulated only following a campaign of domestic disobedience on Smyth’s part designed to ‘make life at home so intolerable that they would have to let me go for their own sakes’.\textsuperscript{16} She was subsequently to make explicit the parallel between this period in her childhood and the militant deeds of the suffragettes, writing that she ‘quite deliberately adopted the methods used years afterwards in political warfare by other women, who, having plumbed the depths of masculine prejudice, came to see this was the only road to victory’.\textsuperscript{17} Returning there as an adult, Smyth found the everyday distractions of family life at Frimhurst unconducive to her work as a composer, concluding that ‘unless my musician’s soul was to be lost I must go back to Germany ... I now knew, after giving it a long patient trial, that to live an artist’s life at Frimhurst was an impossibility’.\textsuperscript{18} Nonetheless, it was during this time that Smyth made influential friends in the local area who were to provide invaluable support for her musical career on the national stage, including Empress Eugénie, the exiled widow of Napoleon III of France, who resided at Farnborough Hill, a large house in neighbouring Farnborough. Through the Empress, whom Smyth described as ‘the most wonderful friend to me and mine’, the composer came to the attention of Queen Victoria on the Balmoral estate in October 1891.\textsuperscript{19} She performed for her extracts from her Mass in D at the piano, ‘after the manner of composers, which means singing the chorus as well as the solo parts, and trumpeting forth orchestral effects as best you can’.\textsuperscript{20} The Empress facilitated the première of Smyth’s Mass as well as her first opera, \textit{Fantasio} (1892–4), for which she identified an interested theatre as well as offering to fund the production. Smyth also maintained cordial relations with another of England’s most illustrious composers of the period, Sir Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert and
Sullivan renown), with whom she had much in common. Sullivan’s family had lived in the
neighbouring town of Camberley during his childhood, since his father was bandmaster at the
Royal Military College, Sandhurst, although they had moved out of the area shortly before Smyth
was born. Smyth made Sullivan’s acquaintance only in 1890, when both were adults. They enjoyed
reminiscing about their respective childhoods in the area, as well as exchanging views on one
another's compositions. Indeed, Sullivan appears to have been one of the few professional
musicians from whom Smyth graciously accepted constructive criticism, and he evidently admired
her work, writing that ‘I hope you are beginning a brilliant and dignified musical career’.21

One Oak, Frimley

Frimhurst was sold following the death in 1894 of Smyth’s father. Her mother had died three
years previously, all of her five sisters were married and her surviving brother had entered the
service of the British army and, like his father before him, was stationed in India. Determining to
find a house to live on her own, Smyth chose remain in the area, partly owing to the strong
connections she had made there such as her burgeoning friendship with the Empress Eugénie.
Later that same year, she and her dog Marco moved to One Oak in Frimley, a sixteenth-century
cottage, located on the Portsmouth Road. Smyth discussed One Oak several times in her
memoirs: firstly in an autobiographical essay in Streaks of Life (1921); then, briefly, in the epilogue
to As Time Went On... (1936), the second instalment of her chronological memoirs; and finally, in
the opening chapter of its successor, What Happened Next (1940). While she described the
property as ‘an ideal eight-roomed cottage in our old neighbourhood, surrounded by fields and
woods’, evidently much renovation had been in order.22 Smyth reported that ‘The last occupants of
the two living rooms [at the front] had been a pony and a donkey’ and that ‘the installation of
conveniences not insisted on by four-footed tenants’ was sorely needed.23 She related how the
drinking water came from a well, and that the standards of cleanliness and the ‘practically non-
existent’ sanitation left much to be desired.24 After two years’ work transforming her house, with
friends pitching in to help, it became to Smyth ‘the dwelling one had dreamed of but never
expected to find’.25 Not knowing its real name, she christened it ‘One Oak’, because ‘there was one
special oak-tree standing up on a mound just in front of the house ... regardless of the fact that there were other obscure oak-trees all along the fifty yards or so of frontage’. 26

During Smyth’s residence, One Oak was host to such celebrated figures of the day as Emmeline Pankhurst and George Bernard Shaw, as well as Thomas Beecham, the conductor and impresario, a staunch musical ally of Smyth’s, whom she was later to immortalise in a biographical sketch in her book *Beecham and Pharaoh* (1935). 27 Plans for the blue plaque that now commemorates the building’s famous former resident may be traced back to 1969 (one to Sir Arthur Sullivan was planned to be erected at the same time). 28 It was some years later before it finally appeared, however, and the dates it displays (1895–1908) are not quite correct since Smyth was still living there in 1910 at the time of her earliest suffragette activity.

Coign, Hook Heath, Woking

The year 1910 saw Smyth’s pledge to the ‘Votes for Women’ campaign and also her move away from Frimley to settle in Hook Heath, near Woking, where she remained until her death in 1944. The lease at One Oak was due to expire and Smyth’s landlady had informed her that, since she intended to modernise and extend the property, the quarterly rent would be increasing (unless she was prepared to pay for the renovations herself). 29 Funds to purchase and develop a plot of land had been donated to Smyth by the reclusive American heiress, Mary Dodge, an important patron who provided her with an annual stipend and financially underwrote performances of a number of her works. These included the English stage première of her latest opera, *The Wreckers*, at His Majesty’s Theatre in 1909. Smyth’s unpublished memoir, *A Fresh Start*, relates that while discussing the question of whether to stay at One Oak, Dodge had suggested to her that ‘I ought to have a house of my own ... near enough to London to suit me, and close to a good golf course’. 30 For this reason, Smyth’s new house, which ‘owing to its place on the map’ was already called ‘Coign’, was built on Hook Heath Road adjacent to Woking Golf Club. 31 As a passionate sportswoman throughout her life, Smyth had been elected as a member two years prior to her move. She referred to the location as ‘a derelict corner of Hook Health, too small for the
requirements of rich businessmen who build humble-looking yet sumptuous villas round about suburban golf links’. Sylvia Pankhurst was to describe the house as ‘a pleasant, modern cottage, built to [Smyth’s] own fancy’; Smyth herself retailed that she ‘drew little plans of the rooms, each carefully fitted with spaces for doors and windows to suit my hundred pounds’ worth of furniture’. Smyth’s memoirs express her frustration at the architect, Arthur Messer, for having had the house built parallel to the road rather than at an angle to it as she had specifically requested. She feared that the field to the south would one day be developed and that she would consequently lose the sunlight. Subsequent years revealed that her fears were not unfounded.

Smyth, Surrey, and Emmeline Pankhurst

As has been seen, Coign frequently played host to suffragettes, not least Emmeline Pankhurst herself, during Smyth’s period of service to the movement. How had Smyth risen to such prominence within the WSPU that the fate of its charismatic leader lay at her doorstep in 1913? The chain of events had been set in motion three years earlier, when Lady Constance Lytton – who was to court scandal by adopting the persona of the lowly seamstress ‘Jane Warton’ and thereby drawing attention to the treatment received by working-class suffragettes in prison – specifically targeted high-profile, card-carrying women in a bid to recruit them to the women’s suffrage cause. Smyth, having recently received the first of her honorary doctorates and being an ‘old acquaintance’ of Lytton’s, was naturally on her list. Smyth’s initial reaction had been not to involve herself in politics – she even wrote a letter, never sent, in response to Lytton politely turning her down on the grounds that any such activism on her part would inevitably be at the expense of her music. By her own retrospective admission, she ‘knew little and cared less about the Suffrage’. Indeed, she had left England two years earlier to distance herself from the ‘Votes for Women’ campaign. However, following discussion with the Austrian novelist Hermann Bahr, during which he expressed surprise that she had not yet joined the suffragettes, her stance changed. She consented to attend a WSPU meeting with Lady Muriel de la Warr, a friend whom she had known in her childhood when they played in the same cricket team, and who had found her the plot of land on which Coign was built. Neither Smyth nor Pankhurst received the other
warmly on first impression, but Smyth’s stance softened once Pankhurst commenced her powerful speech. Less than a fortnight later, in a letter dated 15 September 1910, Smyth wrote to Pankhurst, offering her services to the suffragette cause, and she became, in her words, ‘swept into the hottest heart of the fight for the Vote’.\(^{41}\) As she wrote over fifteen years after the fact, in \textit{A Final Burning of Boats} (1928):

> In the autumn of 1911 [\textit{recte}: 1910] I realised for the first time what ‘Votes for Women’ meant, and it seemed to me that all self-respecting women ... were called upon to take action. Nothing is less compatible with musical creation than politics of any kind, and the particularly devastating effect of a struggle such as the militants were engaged in ... needs no stressing. There was only one thing to be done; it would spell ruin to the painfully sown little musical crop, but other women were giving life itself. ... I determined to devote two years of my life to the Cause, and afterwards return to my own job.\(^{42}\)

Thereafter, Smyth and Pankhurst developed an especially close friendship, the exact nature of which has never been definitively established. The possibility that it was a lesbian relationship has been repeatedly suggested, although the evidence is circumstantial.\(^{43}\) All the same, the emergence of what Smyth herself described as ‘the deepest and closest of friendships’ with the person she somewhat presumptuously addressed as her ‘darling Em’ caused eyebrows to raise sufficiently that Pankhurst’s daughters Christabel and Sylvia viewed her with some suspicion.\(^{44}\) Sylvia’s biography of her mother described her as ‘entirely subjugated by Mrs. Pankhurst, panting with joy and excitement when she could manage to inveigle her idol to her cottage near Woking’.\(^{45}\) Owing partly to the strength of her relationship with Emmeline Pankhurst and partly to the fervent enthusiasm with which Smyth typically embraced new ventures, her previous ambivalence to the suffragette movement dramatically gave way as she rose to become a leading figure in the campaign. She wore the trademark colours of violet, white, and green incongruously as part of her everyday attire, and headed up processions including the Musicians’ section of the great Suffrage procession in 1911.\(^{46}\) She wrote articles for women’s suffrage and mainstream publications,\(^{47}\) and addressed rallies such as the WSPU meeting at the Pavilion in March 1912, where she shared the stage with a number of key figures in the movement. Smyth’s activities had local as well as
inter/national ramifications; for instance, she chaired a speech delivered by Pankhurst in Woking on the evening of 2 October 1911 and attempted to ghost-write one of the many articles that had been solicited from her by newspapers in the USA and elsewhere.48

Pankhurst became a frequent visitor to Coign. It was on the heath outside the house – on what is now probably Woking Golf Club’s thirteenth fairway – that Smyth attempted to teach her to throw stones to hit their target.49 This was in preparation for the orchestrated window-smashing campaign that famously took place across the West End of London on 4 March 1912 in protest against Prime Minister H.H. Asquith’s continued prevarication over granting women the vote. Smyth retrospectively recalled that (unlike her) ‘Mrs Pankhurst was not a cricketer’ and exhibited little skill in aiming and throwing objects.50 Elsewhere she told the story about how, during Pankhurst’s practice session with her, ‘the first stone flew backwards out of her hand, narrowly missing my dog’.51 Participating in the co-ordinated campaign herself, Smyth elected to target the private Berkeley Square home of the anti-Suffragist colonial secretary, Lewis Harcourt, having taken exception to a remark he had made to the extent that if all women were as pretty and wise as his own wife then he would grant them the vote with immediacy. Smyth was arrested that evening, along with scores of other suffragettes, and served a gaol sentence in Holloway Prison, London, where she was accommodated in the cell adjacent to Pankhurst. Here she described herself, strangely, as being ‘really very happy’.52 The cell doors were often left unlocked, enabling the suffragettes to entertain one another. This allowed Smyth – prisoner number 15534, sentenced to two months,53 of which she served approximately half of that time before being released – to take afternoon tea with Pankhurst.

It was not Smyth’s only brush with the authorities. She had previously participated in the boycott of the 1911 Census, organised by the Women’s Freedom League (WFL) and supported by the WSPU, writing ‘No vote no census’ on the schedule she submitted. In the wake of the aforementioned window-smashing campaign, she was summoned as a witness for the defence at Emmeline Pankhurst’s trial, testifying that she had not been incited to violence.54 She was arrested again in July 1912, following an aborted arson attack (an important milestone for the movement, in that it was the earliest attempt at a serious crime of this nature) on Harcourt’s country retreat, Nuneham House, in Oxfordshire. The two perpetrators had been discovered prior to carrying out
the act, but only one of the pair had been caught. A card containing the text of Smyth’s ‘The March of the Women’ was recovered at the scene and a witness recalled a name that sounded like ‘Smyth’ being mentioned. Since she had targeted Harcourt’s London residence just a few months previously, the police presumed Smyth to have been the perpetrator and brought her to Oxford for questioning. This caused her to miss the day’s business meetings and not to return to Woking until the small hours despite having an alibi, the charge against her eventually being dismissed only on the grounds of ‘failure to identify’. She was to complain vociferously in the press afterwards about the ‘feebleminded guesswork’ and general incompetence of the police. Her arrest made international headlines, having been reported in the *New York Times*. Sylvia Pankhurst retold the story in *The Suffragette Movement*, without directly naming the culprit, Norah Smyth, her close ally and a key member of the East London Federation of the Suffragettes, who was a distant relative of Ethel’s.

Smyth’s roots in Woking and the surrounding area brought her into contact with other key figures of women’s suffrage, both at the time and subsequently. She described her long-standing friend, the Empress Eugénie, as an ‘ardent suffragist ... utterly bowled over’ by Pankhurst. Mary Dodge was similarly sympathetic to the cause and provided Pankhurst with a car after learning of Smyth’s having joined the WSPU. Smyth regarded locally based non-militant Lady Betty Balfour as ‘my neighbour and great friend’, and she was sufficiently well-acquainted with both her and Constance Lytton as to sit for their brother, the artist Neville Lytton, for the famous 1936 portrait of her now held by the Royal College of Music. In 1923, Smyth was to befriend the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll, who had created large banners for the local branches of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies in nearby Godalming and Guildford (the former is still on display in the town’s museum). Virginia Woolf, with whom Smyth developed a strong friendship in the 1930s, was another who had supported women’s suffrage, albeit working behind the scenes.

Notwithstanding Smyth’s belief that the pursuit of political activism would necessitate sacrificing her art, she continued to bring her works before the public during her suffragette years. Emmeline, Christabel, and Sylvia Pankhurst were all present at a concert of her music given at the Queen’s Hall by the London Symphony Orchestra and Crystal Palace Choir on 29 June 1911, conducted by the composer. Some negative press comments on this event prompted a published
defence by Emily Wilding Davison, the suffragette best known for having died tragically two years
later following a collision with King George V’s horse at the Epsom Derby.\textsuperscript{64} Moreover, while Smyth
claimed that ‘an atmosphere of fierce political warfare is not one in which the Muses can be
successfully wooed’, she nonetheless continued to write music during this period.\textsuperscript{65} As Elizabeth
Wood has discussed, her politics are reflected in her contemporaneous suffrage works, which
include \textit{Hey Nonny No} (1910), the three \textit{Songs of Sunrise} (1910), the final movement of her String
Quartet (1912–13), her songs ‘On the Road’ and ‘Possession’ from \textit{Three Songs} (1913), and \textit{The
Boatswain’s Mate} (1913–14).\textsuperscript{66} Rachel Lumsden has explored the personal and political
significance of ‘Possession’ through analytically investigating its relationship to Smyth’s wider
musical and literary output, whilst my own forthcoming study of \textit{The Boatswain’s Mate} re-evaluates
the opera’s complex relationship to feminism via various lines of enquiry.\textsuperscript{67} In some instances, the
resonances of Smyth’s suffrage activity were apparent in the works’ dedications, including
‘Possession’, dedicated to E.P. (Emmeline Pankhurst), and ‘On the Road’, dedicated to
Pankhurst’s daughter Christabel. In others, it was made manifest in the synopses and song texts,
such as the first two \textit{Songs of Sunrise}, ‘Laggard Dawn’ and ‘1910’, the former obliquely concerning
the plight of the suffragettes and the latter an operetta-style re-enactment of the events of so-called
Black Friday (18 November) of the titular year.

But it was the last of the \textit{Songs of Sunrise}, ‘The March of the Women’, based on an Abruzzi
folk melody, that reflected Smyth’s newfound political stance more than any other. Its rousing call-
to-arms text had been added to Smyth’s music by suffragette Cicely Hamilton, co-author (together
with Smyth’s biographer Christopher St John) of the play \textit{How the Vote was Won}\.\textsuperscript{68} John
Masefield, G.K. Chesterton, and John Galsworthy had all previously been approached by Smyth
and declined the task.\textsuperscript{69} Formally presented to Pankhurst at a WSPU meeting in January 1911 and
reciprocally leading to its composer’s being ceremoniously presented with a conductor’s baton with
a gold band at the Royal Albert Hall two months later, the piece soon became adopted as the
suffragette anthem, all members being required to commit it to memory. It was this tune that the
suffragettes sung loudly at rallies and on demonstrations, as well as to bolster morale during
arrests, imprisonment and periods of hunger striking. On one occasion, Smyth ran past the porter
into Prime Minister Asquith’s residence at No. 10 Downing Street, up the stairs and into the
drawing-room, banging out the tune on the piano while the Cabinet was in session. On another, Pankhurst wrote to Smyth to say that ‘during sleepless nights I sang the “March [of the Women]” and “Laggard Dawn” in such a queer cracked voice’ to console herself. The ideological position embodied by ‘The March of the Women’ spilled over into other works as well. It is quoted in ‘On the Road’, most notably at the end of the song, and in the Overture to The Boatswain’s Mate, where it appears alongside ‘1910’, most unconventionally in that the movement therefore has no direct musical relationship to the remainder of the opera. Wood has suggested that Smyth, who wrote the libretto of The Boatswain’s Mate as well as the music, may have even modelled its strong-minded, independent heroine, Mrs Waters, on Pankhurst herself.

Smyth conducted all manner of performances of ‘The March of the Women’, at occasions ranging from private WSPU meetings, to concerts, to satirical plays such as Laurence Housman’s Alice in Ganderland, to large-scale suffrage demonstrations. She famously attempted to coordinate an act of singing during her time in Holloway Prison, her arm thrust between the bars of her cell window, frantically using her toothbrush as a makeshift baton in a bid to keep the suffragettes exercising in the yard below in time with one another, as Thomas Beecham observed during a visit to the composer. Indeed, Smyth’s last public act of service to the suffragettes came on 6 March 1930, when, wearing her usual doctoral robes, she conducted the Metropolitan Police Band and Chorus in front of a crowd of thousands in a performance of ‘The March of the Women’ at the unveiling of the memorial statue of Emmeline Pankhurst at Victoria Tower Gardens, London, overlooked by the Houses of Parliament. A few years later, she was to publish an extensive biographical sketch in Female Pipings in Eden of her dear friend, with whom she had fallen out most abruptly in 1921 over some strong criticisms she had expressed of Christabel in their correspondence, never to reconcile.
We have it on the authority of Vera Brittain, the writer and pacifist, that Smyth once expressed ‘on a public platform that the title she would have preferred to any other was “Ethel, Duchess of Woking”’. Smyth played an important role at the forefront of the cultural and sporting life of the local area. The latter, in turn, reciprocally influenced her work. By her own testimony, she took inspiration from Woking and Hook Heath in her art, writing of her operas that ‘my object is to set life to music as I myself have seen and overheard it, in trains, in buses, in my own village, [and] on my own golf course’. Smyth’s interest in golf was kindled in her childhood and, as her biographer St John noted, ‘grew more inordinate’ in the period following the death in 1908 of Henry Brewster, Smyth’s long-standing friend (she categorically stated that ‘we were not lovers’) and the librettist for her first three operas. It is surely no coincidence that this was also the year in which she was elected to membership of Woking Golf Club. Some years later, she appeared on a group photo of Woking Ladies’ Golf Club, taken on 9 May 1928. Vera Brittain related that Smyth considered the Woking golf course to be ‘her individual kingdom’; Such was her love of the sport that, at her request, her ashes were scattered on woodland in its vicinity.

Around 1913, golf clubs had become a specific target nationally of attacks from the suffragettes, who had set fire to buildings and destroyed parts of the greens. Woking Golf Club was sufficiently fearful of damage to its property that one of its members, Mrs H.L. Strachan, took it upon herself directly to telephone Emmeline Pankhurst, with whom she was friends. She subsequently reported that during ‘earnest’ conversation, Pankhurst had told her that ‘Woking [Golf Club] has owed its immunity to several prominent Suffragettes being on the list of members & at the head of them Dr Ethel Smythe – !!! [sic] ... & I gather from [Pankhurst] that the Destroying Angel has passed over us’. Nonetheless, the Ladies’ Committee offered money towards the protection of the golf course and any damage that might be caused, and as a deterrent, the suffragettes who were members of the club were held personally accountable and threatened with expulsion were it ever to be attacked. In the event, no such incident ever took place.

Smyth’s local activities were not restricted to sport. Reporting on her death, the Woking News & Mail noted that ‘she was a familiar figure in the town, and those associated with the
musical life of the district will especially regret the passing of one who did much, by her brilliant attainments and influential patronage, to bring good music within the reach of local people.\textsuperscript{87} She was a long-standing patron of Woking Musical Society, being particularly active in the 1920s, when she conducted the choir and orchestra.\textsuperscript{88} Friends and residents in Woking contributed to a fund to offset the considerable costs of her participation in a concert featuring her music in Berlin in December 1928, at which she became the first woman to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.\textsuperscript{89} She was also one of the six signatories of the letter from Woking Musical Society proposing a presentation fund for Patrick H. White, the founder and honorary conductor of the Society, following his retirement.\textsuperscript{90}

Fellow Woking-based musician Adelina de Lara (1872–1961) the world-renowned concert pianist, composer, recording artist, teacher, writer, broadcaster, and pupil of Clara Schumann, counted Smyth among her ‘closest friends’.\textsuperscript{91} At a more modest stage in de Lara’s career, Smyth had written to the local papers by way of promoting her publicly, describing her piano-playing as possessing

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
\item a bigness, a simplicity, a mastery, an utterly musical reading ... The blessed respect for her art ... reveals itself at every turn ... the fine rich touch, ... the beauty, the ease, the smoothness, the command of style.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}

Smyth’s active promotion of a junior contemporary was especially significant given that her published writings were in general remarkably reticent on the whole issue of female composers other than herself.\textsuperscript{93} She and de Lara had briefly been members of the Society of Women Musicians (SWM) shortly after it was founded in 1911, during Smyth’s period in the service of the suffragette movement. Having heard her play on multiple occasions over the years, Smyth wrote again to the papers to urge the public to support a benefit concert for de Lara in 1940.\textsuperscript{94} De Lara’s career trajectory, indeed, mirrored Smyth’s in that she similarly turned to autobiography later in life, publishing \textit{Finale} – which includes a chapter partly on Smyth – in 1955, one year after retiring from performing professionally in public at the age of 82.\textsuperscript{95} De Lara was reciprocally to promote Smyth’s output, performing works including her Violin Sonata in the local area, for instance at a concert in Woking organised by Betty Balfour.\textsuperscript{96} She co-organised an orchestral concert in 1936 that included
Smyth’s works, believed to have been the last time that Smyth, then approaching her eighties and profoundly deaf, conducted publicly in Woking.97

**Posthumous Commemorations**

When Smyth died on 8 May 1944, Adelina de Lara was again at the forefront of the senior composer’s remembrances in their shared town of residence. For the *Woking News & Mail* she wrote an ‘Appreciation’ of Smyth, her ‘valued friend and patron’, of whom she generously said that ‘everyone knows she was the greatest woman musician in the world, an erudite authoress and profound scholar’.98 She organised a memorial concert to her in Woking, featuring acclaimed musicians including herself and the composer Roger Quilter.99 In Frimley, Smyth’s brother Robert (Bob) Smyth was the instigator in 1946 of a tablet to be inscribed ‘In memory of ETHEL SMYTH. D.B.E., Mus.Doc., 1858–1944’ to be mounted in the parish church of St Peter’s, Frimley, where her parents and her brother John are buried.100 It was opposite the pulpit, on the south wall, that the tablet was erected, where it remains adjacent to one to her father. Slightly further afield, a memorial service was held for Smyth at the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, City of Westminster, London on 5 June 1944, at which the first movement of her String Quartet and the soprano solo of the ‘Benedictus’ from her Mass in D were performed.101

Smyth’s service to the suffragette movement, although comparatively brief, has created a lasting impact that has kept her memory alive in mainstream historical narratives to the extent that it has recently nurtured substantial interest in her music as well. While the significant challenge she posed throughout her career to the stranglehold of the (musical) patriarchy may have contributed negatively to the reception of her works in her own day, ironically it may be this same resistance to inequality of the sexes on Smyth’s part, in a different context, that has led to a proliferation of performances of her music in the current centenary year. For it is only through considering her compositional output alongside the sociocultural obstacles that inhibited her progress at every turn, as well as the remarkable strategies by which she sought to overcome them, that her inspirational achievements as a path-breaking female artist may fully be appreciated.
Notes


8 Ethel Smyth, ‘Recollections of Brahms’, *Female Pipings in Eden* ([London], Peter Davies, 1933, 2nd ed. 1934), 57–70, at 60, 67.


10 These include Ethel Smyth, *Streaks of Life* (London, Longmans, 1921, 2nd ed. 1924), *A Final Burning of Boats etc.* (see above, n.5, for citation), and *Beecham and Pharaoh* (London, Chapman & Hall, 1935).


12 Surrey Heath Museum & Heritage Services, Knoll Road, Camberley (hereafter SHM), Frimhurst Frimley R.288, 2 folders, H.M. Land Registry indenture, 21 Dec. 1874.


27 Smyth, ‘Thomas Beecham (Fantasia in B# major)’, *Beecham and Pharaoh*, 1–75.


30 Smyth, *Fresh Start*, 16.


40 St John, Ethel Smyth, 144–5; Smyth, Fresh Start, 17.

41 Smyth, ‘Female Pipings in Eden’, Female Pipings in Eden, 3–56, at 42.


46 ‘Dr. Ethel Smyth as Suffragist [sic]’, The Musical Times, 61/923 (1 Jan. 1920), 25.

47 For example, Ethel Smyth, ‘Better Late Than Never’, Votes for Women, 18 Nov. 1910.


52 Smyth, Fresh Start, 32.

53 The National Archives of the UK, Kew, Surrey, HO 144/1195, List of suffragettes gaol at Holloway Prison who have sentences of two months or less and have not previously been imprisoned, 25 Mar. 1912.


55 Smyth, Fresh Start, 35.


60 Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, 102.


63 ‘Dr. Ethel Smyth’s Concert’, *Votes for Women*, 7 Jul. 1911.


66 Wood, ‘Performing Rights’ (see above, n.44, for citation).


69 St John, *Ethel Smyth*, 151.


Smyth, ‘Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928)’ (see above, n.37, for citation).


Surrey History Centre, Woking (hereafter SHC), 8890/7/1, Woking Musical Society, Choral Section, Jubilee Dinner, Friday 15 Nov. 1946, Albion Hotel, Woking.


SHC, 8890/7/1, Letter from Woking Musical Society, Nov. 1927.

92 Quoted in de Lara, *Finale*, 187.


98 De Lara, ‘Ethel Smyth’.


101 Lewis Orchard Collection, SHC, 9180/1, Order of Service, ‘In memoriam Ethel Smyth D.B.E., Mus.Doc., D.Litt.’.

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