

In fact, the Major had made a mistake: no such meeting ever took place. The events that led up to Christabel's disappearance, however, convinced Sylvia that she had to return to England. Her mother faced months, perhaps years, of imprisonment and so it was clear that the movement was not on the threshold of victory. Sylvia concluded: 'I neither could nor would now withdraw to another country, nor immerse myself in any large work unconnected with the movement.'¹⁴

On her return from America, Sylvia travelled in disguise to Paris where she had been informed Christabel was hiding. There she found that Christabel did not envisage handing any organisational control to those she distrusted politically, including Sylvia. Christabel, it seems, would not have minded if Sylvia had stayed in America – indeed, Sylvia later recalled that Christabel's advice at this time was to '[b]ehave as though you were not in the country!'¹⁵ It was advice that Sylvia entirely disregarded. Concerned that an elitist campaign relying upon ever smaller numbers of activists would be inadequate to overcome government opposition and the increasing levels of state repression, Sylvia attempted to transform suffragette agitation into a mass movement. She began by organising a series of huge demonstrations over the summer to support the imprisoned WSPU leaders, and then, more fundamentally, by taking steps to galvanise mass, working-class involvement.¹⁶ She would initiate this latter project in East London where she aimed 'not merely to make some members and establish some branches [of the WSPU], but [at] the larger task of bringing the district as a whole into a mass movement, from which only a minority would stand aside.'¹⁷ In the autumn of 1912, she looked for a suitable headquarters for this East London campaign. She later recalled that: 'I set out with Zelig Emerson down the dingy Bow Road' and found a shop to rent.¹⁸

What followed is familiar to suffrage historians. Sylvia and the East London suffragettes were expelled from the WSPU in 1914 after Sylvia appeared on a platform supporting the victimised workers of the employers' lockout of trade unionists in Dublin. Forming the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS), they continued to organise a radical campaign which linked women's political emancipation to labour struggles and Irish anti-imperialists. The ELFS's divergence from the WSPU would become most starkly apparent with the outbreak of the First World War, when Emmeline and Christabel announced that the WSPU would suspend campaigning for the vote and support the war effort, while Sylvia and the ELFS established community services to

support working-class women facing further hardship in wartime, and eventually adopted an explicitly anti-war stance.

The developments of 1912, then, are understood to have had a profound impact on the history of the suffrage movement in Britain. Less well understood, however, is what prompted Sylvia to take the action she did then, when previously she had kept her political differences with her mother and sister private. Sylvia's lecture tours of America in 1911 and 1912 traverse her dramatic change of approach. Yet few connections have been drawn between the transatlantic change in Sylvia's environment and the change she effected soon after in the suffragette movement.¹⁹ Moreover, with the expanding historiographical interest in the role of friendship networks in feminist campaigns, it is surprising that there has been so little attention afforded to the fact that Sylvia outlined that, from the outset, she was supported in her East London endeavour by Zelig Emerson, a young American woman who she met on tour.²⁰

It seems that it was in the midst of creating the East London suffragette campaign that Sylvia was writing her book about America: a reference in Chapter 4 to something happening 'now' was provided with a handwritten footnote reading 'February 1913' (p. 105). Sylvia was particularly busy in February 1913. Early in that month, she and Emerson opened a new suffragette headquarters on East London's Roman Road. On 14 February, the two were arrested and imprisoned for window smashing only to be released after Emmeline Pankhurst had their fines paid (perhaps to keep them from the limelight). On 17 February, Sylvia and Emerson again smashed windows during an East London suffragette protest and were sentenced to prison, this time to two months' hard labour without the option of a fine. In protest at their treatment they undertook hunger and thirst strikes and endured the horrors of forcible feeding. At the end of the first month, Emerson was so tormented by her experience that she had tried to cut through an artery, while Sylvia forced her own release through adopting a rest strike – walking continuously, day and night, up and down the prison cell.

It was in this context that Sylvia was recalling her American experiences. She evidently envisaged speedy publication of the American book: it is full of topical references and up-to-date figures while, as will be discussed, potentially compromising personal details associated with the manuscript's origin were carefully expunged, indicating preparation for public consumption. It was apparently never sent to a publisher, probably because Sylvia did not complete the work. Some of the typescript was