

Suffragist photography in Camden

2018 was the centenary of the suffrage movement's achievement of votes for women, in England and from age 30 at least.¹ An unrecorded footnote is the contribution of Alice Maud Barker and Albert Oscar Mohr, who had their photographic studio, the Merchants' Portrait Company, in **106-110 Kentish Town Road** (the Dunn's clothing warehouse). Shows the Merchant's Portrait Co. sign:



(Photo in the Camden Local Studies Archive, it was used for a planning application in renovation of the building.)

Photography archives record Mohr as an enlarger, living in Holloway, and he may have done the printing. Little is known of Barker – although an Ethel Barker was a family portraitist in Putney, and an Ethel Alice Maud Barker had a divorce in 1919.

¹ Yvonne Melnick described Camden's links with the suffragettes in *Camden History Review* 2000; 24: 42. An exhibition was held at the Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre in 2018.

A portrait taken by the Merchants' Portrait Company in 1909 was of Charlotte Despard, first president of the Women's Social and Political Union, who "wore sandals all year round and always had a Spanish mantilla on her head".



The Barker & Mohr photos of Charlotte Despard are in The National Archives. There's a photo of Charlotte Despard on the Wikipedia website:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte_Despard#/media/File:Mrs._Despard_\(suffragette\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte_Despard#/media/File:Mrs._Despard_(suffragette).jpg)

The Merchants' Portrait Company lives on in the contemporary world through another medium: lapel-badges from the period bearing the company's name and address printed on the pin are nowadays collected as memorabilia. Styling themselves "Makers of the Womens' Social and Political Union badge", the company marketed a picture of the WSPU founder Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst for sale with feminist-coloured ribbons for 5d. And their badge for the Women's Freedom League, now in the Museum of London, encourages women to boycott the April 1911 Census through spoiled or incomplete census returns.

Source (several available) for the badges:

<https://jordansmithwar.wordpress.com/category/text-secondary-sources/page/2/>

and for the medal photo:

https://wikivisually.com/wiki/File:Portrait_Badge_of_Emmeline_Pankhurst_-_c1909_-_Museum_of_London.jpg

Also Museum of London:



<https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/65678.html>

ID: 50.82/1171 Production date:1911 Location: In Store 35mm

'Round button badge issued to promote the Census Resistance campaign of 1911. In 1911, the Tax Resistance League encouraged members of the Women's Freedom League to boycott the April 1911 Census. Women householders were encouraged to return either spoiled or incomplete census returns.'

Museum of London – other materials..

