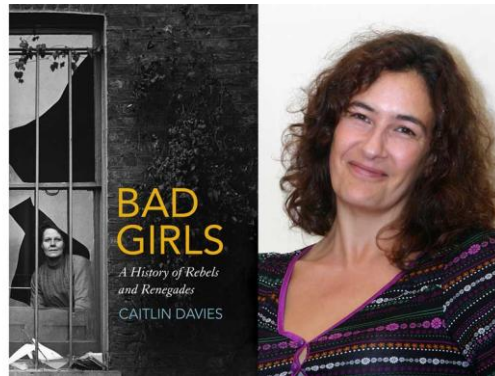


From prison to parliament: the Suffragettes & Holloway

Holloway prison was, at the time of the fight for female suffrage, the largest women's prison in Europe. Hundreds of Suffragettes were incarcerated there, many suffering hunger strikes as they continued their campaigning from within the prison walls. Caitlin Davies's book *Bad Girls* looks into the history of Holloway prison.



Arriving at Holloway

The first Suffragette arrived at Holloway in 1906. To begin with, the Suffragettes were bound over to keep the peace, asked to promise not to re-offend, and given a fine. When they refused to pay the fine, they were sent to Holloway. As they escalated from minor acts of street protest to criminal damage, they received more severe sentences.

In the same way, they escalated their resistance to Holloway's prison rules. As more Suffragettes were imprisoned, they fought with prison authorities more and more.

When new suffragettes arrived at Holloway they would be put in the prison hospital, to keep them away from the hundreds of other Suffragettes already imprisoned. Behaviour would spread between prisoners, so if one smashed a window to improve the ventilation, the others would as well. The governor found the Suffragettes a thorn in his side and thought the press helped to encourage them.

Seeking publicity from their imprisonment

This was the time when the British public first learnt what was going on inside Holloway prison. You had up to 200 suffragettes being admitted on a single day. These were often educated women, some with influential friends. They were clearly documenting what was going on, they hoarded their arrest warrants, smuggled out letters, kept secret diaries. When they were released they would be greeted with cheering crowds and given a medal, the Holloway brooch. Sometimes they would give interviews to journalists on the day of their release. They didn't just promote the cause of suffrage, but also wanted to make things better for the women imprisoned in Holloway.

Holloway was based on the separate and silent system: you were isolated in your cell and no-one was supposed to talk to each other. The Suffragettes started defying prison discipline and making constant complaints and demands.

Hunger strikes

The big thing for the suffragettes was they wanted to be recognised as political prisoners, so that was why they went on hunger strike. This was another way they were fighting the system. The hunger strike was, if we're not going to be treated as first class prisoners then we will refuse to obey the rules and we will refuse to eat.