

# Hunger strikes and forced feeding

Upon arrival, the women were stripped and forced to wear prison clothes. Some were given forced haircuts and their belongings were taken away from them. Their cells were very basic, and conditions were harsh. The government were embarrassed and unsure on how to deal with so many women being arrested. One thing which was allowed was women were able to write and receive letters. These letters still serve as a shocking memory of what life was like for the suffragettes.

## Suffragette Mary Richardson's account of force feeding

Forcible feeding is to my mind one of the worst forms of torture imaginable. The attack is brutal the method primitive. When I was first forcibly fed, I offered only passive resistance but after a few days the process became so degrading so morally staining to me as well as increasingly painful that I was obliged to resist the struggle. With ten wardresses is severe and in it the arms and legs are twisted, and the hands badly cut by the wardresses' nails. After these ten wardresses had overcome me and thrown me violently on the bed three of them lay full weight across my legs. My knees are still painful. I cannot go up or down stairs without difficulty. On several occasions wardresses fell on top of me on the floor. Once so severely injuring my ribs that I could not lie in bed on my left side for several days. Twice my head was thrown against the wall of the cell owing to my feet being taken from under me violently. My face was blackened and swollen from this.

The process of driving the tube through the nose is very terrible as the tube is usually too large for the nasal cavity and when there appears any obstruction more and more violent pushing is resorted to on one occasion Doctor Pearson almost tore my nose in his repeated efforts to force the tube through the opening. After 30 times of nasal feeding my face eyes and nose were so swollen and bruised that Dr Pearson brought in a home office specialist and after consultation, he announced that he would feed me by the throat tube. Thereafter I refused to be and set my teeth together whereupon he ran his second finger through my lips cutting them and then finding the extremity of my jaw he deliberately cut my cheek with his fingernail. I cried out at his cruelty, but he continued until in agony my teeth were parted, and a metal spring gag inserted followed by the feeding tube. By this time the blood from my cut cheek and gums were running from the corner of my mouth down the neck into my clothing and I began to choke violently. The pain of this operation was beyond my insurance. I was driven almost mad by it and springing off the bed when they had left off holding me, I ran out of my cell. Dr Pearson said I was in a dangerous state of mind and must be treated accordingly with the result that they refused to open my cell door when I needed anything and contented themselves with shouting at me as they went to a lunatic. The following day Dr Pearson told me he had decided to return to nasal feeding, and I was fed accordingly until I was

discharged four days later owing to an attack of appendicitis. This was brought on by the hospital treatment I had been receiving.