

FAMILY HISTORY • RESEARCH ARTICLE

"A Household Inside the Movement: The O'Briens of 106 Cadogan Terrace" (v1.08)

The O'Brien family in Bow's radical world

Cigar makers, suffragettes, socialist friendship, music—and the paintings
Sylvia Pankhurst left behind



"Yours for the Revolution"

Minnie O'Brien to George Lansbury, 27 November 1912



Prepared from family papers and archival sources • 27 July 2026, revised 18 August 2026

A note on evidence

This article is a research draft, not a final proof of every family story. It deliberately distinguishes three kinds of evidence. “Documented” means that a contemporary record or identifiable archive source has been located. “Family testimony” means a recollection, letter or tradition preserved by descendants. “Working inference” means that the evidence fits, but a decisive record has not yet been found. Family testimony is treated as evidence in its own right—especially for domestic life and personality—but not as a substitute for a tenancy, rate-book entry, civil certificate or contemporary report.

One further principle governs the use of that testimony, and it needs stating because it is easy to invert. A recent document is not necessarily an earlier source than an old memory. The published accounts of the paintings all date from 2002 or later, and all derive, directly or at one remove, from the family; each retelling has added tidiness rather than information. The family’s own traditions sit upstream of them. Those traditions are unreliable in the ways oral memory is always unreliable—dates, sequence, and the line between what a teller saw and what a teller was told—but they are strong on what a late document cannot supply: who was connected to whom, what was owed, and what changed hands. Where a family recollection and a recent printed statement disagree about a relationship or a transaction, this article now prefers the recollection. Where they disagree about a date or an address, the ordinary cautions apply in full. The three tiers below are unchanged; what changes is which source governs when two of them conflict.

Version 1.05 incorporates two research notes of 17 August 2026. The first checked Minnie against the Home Office’s own index of suffrage arrests and found no O’Brien in it. The second re-examined the published provenance of the paintings and concluded that the identification of 400 Old Ford Road is weaker than version 1.04 allowed. Both findings tighten the article rather than enlarge it, and the assessments below have been adjusted accordingly.

Version 1.06 incorporates a third research note, of 18 August 2026, which returns to the family testimony itself. Elsie O’Brien’s letter of March 2002 has been read for what it asserts as well as for what it denies: it names the two men who hired out the hall, places the hall in Old Ford Road without naming a building, and records that most of the paintings had already been reproduced in Richard Pankhurst’s book about his mother. Section 5 has been reorganised around the family evidence, and a fuller range of alternatives to the Women’s Hall is now set out there. The three testimonies on which most of this rests are printed in full in an appendix.

Version 1.07 incorporates a correction to the family tree supplied on 18 August 2026, which closes the question of which Ernest and makes the descent of the paintings traceable person by person. Ernest Frederick O’Brien had two grown children, Elsie and Malcolm. Malcolm married Dorothy; their daughter Molly became Molly Cook, and their son Michael is Katie O’Brien’s father. Every teller quoted here can now be placed by generation, and section 5 has been revised accordingly.

Version 1.08 records the result of the check that version 1.06 called the most promising lead in the file. Richard Pankhurst’s *Sylvia Pankhurst: Artist and Crusader* (1979) has now been seen. Elsie O’Brien was right that the pictures are in it, and its acknowledgments name the custodians of 1979 — but they are not the custodians she named, and the book says nothing whatever about a hall, a landlord or rent. The finding cuts both ways, and section 5 has been revised to say so. It is also a fair test of the principle set out above: Elsie proved reliable on the relationship and unreliable on who was holding the pictures, which is where family memory is expected to be weak.

DOCUMENTED Supported by a located record	FAMILY TESTIMONY A named recollection or tradition	OPEN / INFERRED Plausible, but not yet proved
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The argument in brief

The surviving evidence supports a substantial version of the family tradition. The O'Briens were not merely neighbours who happened to know famous radicals. Minnie Hannah Alice O'Brien was in direct political correspondence with George Lansbury by 1912 and emerges from the movement record as one of Sylvia Pankhurst's loyal organisers: a newspaper seller, event worker and practical troubleshooter. The Home Office index of suffrage arrests contains no O'Brien, which sets a limit on that role: whatever Minnie did for the movement, she was not arrested for it before the amnesty of August 1914. The family home at 106 Cadogan Terrace functioned as a social and political contact point in which music mattered; the family also remembers that Sylvia rented a room there for a time. The paintings form a tangible link between the O'Briens and Sylvia. That Sylvia paid an O'Brien in kind for the use of premises is well supported, and by two objects descending through two different branches of the family. The family's own testimony names the men: Elsie O'Brien wrote in 2002 that her father and grandfather hired out a hall in Old Ford Road. Her father was Ernest Frederick, and the family tree confirms it from the other direction, since Molly Cook—whose grandfather the published account names as the recipient of the paintings—was Ernest Frederick's granddaughter through his son Malcolm. Which Ernest is therefore closed. The street rests on Elsie alone, and the building on nothing closer to the family than an uncited web page. No. 400 remains the leading candidate for the war years, on plausibility rather than on provenance; the years immediately after the war fit it considerably less well. The descent of the pictures themselves is now documented back to 1979, when Richard Pankhurst photographed them in the possession of Malcolm and Dorothy O'Brien. The hall story is not: it appears nowhere before 2002, and not in the 1979 book.

KEY CORRECTION Frederick Henry O'Brien died on 13 January 1940 at St Andrew's Hospital, Devons Road, Poplar—not in 1941 at 106 Cadogan Terrace. The probate-calendar transcription records administration, not probate, which is consistent with his having died without a will.

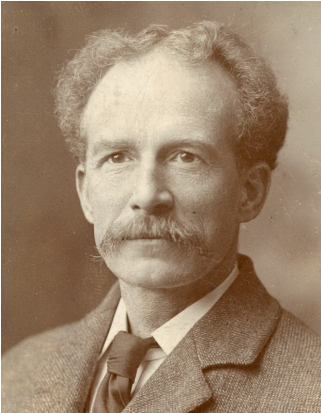
1. A radical household beside Victoria Park



106 Cadogan Terrace in 1899

The centre of this story is a household: first at 73 Cadogan Terrace and later (around 1912), at 106, on the eastern edge of Victoria Park. Frederick Henry O'Brien was a cigar maker. He married Alice Maud Mary Blaikie at St Mary, Stratford Bow, on 4 August 1879, and the couple raised six children. Their eldest daughter, Minnie Hannah Alice, was born about July 1880. The household combined skilled manual work, political argument, education and music. That combination helps explain why its members moved so naturally through the overlapping worlds of trade unionism, socialism and militant women's suffrage.

Frederick Henry O'Brien: craft, union and politics



Frederick Henry O'Brien

Frederick Henry O'Brien was born on 25 April 1858 at 8 Upper Chapman Street, St George in the East, the son of John Gregory O'Brien, cigar maker, and his wife Ann, formerly Nicholson. His birth certificate provides direct evidence of this relationship.

John Gregory's 1878 marriage to Elizabeth Livingstone, née Tyrell, names his father as John O'Brien, a boiler maker. This is the strongest present evidence for Frederick's grandfather. Family tradition, recorded by Norah O'Brien, placed the family's Irish origins in Fermoy, County Cork. Since John Gregory appears to have been



Alice O'Brien

born in Holborn about 1829, any migration from Ireland probably occurred in his parents' or grandparents' generation.

Family recollections agree on Frederick's trade and temperament. Charlie Rendell remembered him as a cigar maker, a Labour supporter, a teetotaller and a member of a tobacco-workers' union. Norah O'Brien remembered his association with the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the organisation George Lansbury joined in 1892. She also remembered him as a Church of England man and as someone who placed a high value on his children's education. Such details fit the culture of skilled East End artisans, among whom craft pride, mutual organisation and socialist politics often reinforced one another.

DOCUMENTED CONTEXT The National Cigar and Tobacco Workers' Union was created only in 1918 by an amalgamation that included the Cigar Makers' Mutual Association. Frederick could therefore have belonged to the national union late in life, but any earlier membership would have been in a predecessor body. The family wording should not be projected unchanged back into the 1880s or 1890s.

Frederick reportedly continued working until about eighty, latterly as a warehouseman in a cigar factory; cigar-box making is also remembered. He died aged about eighty-one. The administration of his estate was granted in London on 30 March 1940 to his son Ernest Frederick O'Brien, described as a licensed victualler, and his daughter Norah Maud Pearsall. His effects were valued at £1,317 9s. 6d. The grant of administration rather than probate strongly supports the family statement that he left no will.

A note on cigar making

Frederick O'Brien and others in the family, worked as a cigar makers, a trade requiring considerably more skill than its title suggests. Production was divided into stages: younger workers often prepared the tobacco and formed the inner 'bunch', while the finer work of applying the outer wrapper and cover was entrusted to experienced hands. A contemporary account noted that the dexterity required for better-quality work could take years to acquire.

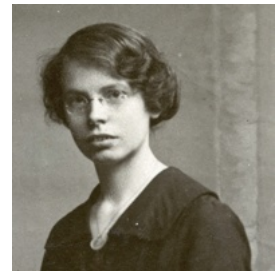
In the later nineteenth century, London's cigar trade was concentrated east of Aldgate, especially around Whitechapel and Shoreditch; Spitalfields and Bethnal Green belonged to the same wider industrial district. Earnings varied sharply with skill and the quality of the cigars produced. Those making cheap cigars, and

those still learning the trade, were often poorly paid, whereas experienced makers of better-quality cigars could earn appreciably more.

The trade also had a notable history of organisation. London cigar makers were involved in trade-union activity and, in some cases, in the radical labour politics of the period. Their unions developed an unusually international outlook, cooperating with fellow workers abroad against strike-breaking and in support of industrial disputes. There were identifiable East End cigar makers among those active in such movements. This does not establish Frederick's own political commitments, but it provides a useful context for the later political and reforming associations of the O'Brien family.

Alice and the work of family support

Alice is less visible in official and political records, but the family evidence places her inside the same economy of support. She is remembered as supplying cakes for suffrage fund-raising, sometimes with her daughter Ethel. That kind of labour rarely appears in formal movement histories, yet meetings, newspapers, deputations and relief work depended on food, rooms, washing, childcare and money. Alice's role belongs in the political story even where the surviving evidence is domestic.

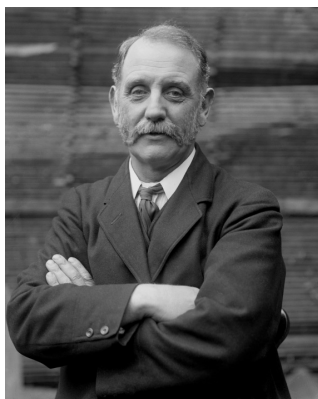


My Grandmother Ethel
O'Brien

2. George Lansbury and the O'Briens

Family tradition says Frederick knew George Lansbury from boyhood, that Lansbury was "almost one of the family", and that he often called at Cadogan Terrace. The childhood claim is possible but not yet proved. Lansbury was born in Suffolk in 1859 and came to east London as a child; Frederick was probably born about 1858. They were near-contemporaries, later shared SDF politics, and lived within Bow's dense network of socialist activism. None of that alone proves a boyhood friendship. Minnie's letter, however, demonstrates a close family connection by 1912.

The letter after the by-election



George Lansbury in 1912

On 26 November 1912 Lansbury lost the Bow and Bromley by-election he had forced by resigning his parliamentary seat and seeking re-election explicitly on women's suffrage. The following day Minnie wrote to him from 106 Cadogan Terrace. The letter survives in the George Lansbury papers at the London School of Economics. Although catalogued as LANSBURY/6, folios 261–262, the digitised letter occupies three photographed sides. Its tone is affectionate, politically committed and familiar. Minnie says she would never forget polling night, when men and women burst into tears at the result. She calls Lansbury "poor George", worries about him throughout the day and signs herself "Yours for the Revolution". The language suggests an existing personal relationship, not a formal appeal from an unknown constituent.

The letter is also a programme for continued action. Minnie wants Lansbury to remain active in Bow and Bromley and proposes Sunday-evening meetings to educate supporters of his victorious Conservative opponent, Reginald Blair. She suggests combining politics with a musical comrade who could play or sing. Most significantly, she reports that people had called at the O'Brien house to ask whether meetings had

begun. Cadogan Terrace was therefore already recognised locally as a point of political contact, while music was understood as a way to gather and hold a working-class audience.

Minnie's arguments were forceful. She rebuked men who had not troubled to vote and turned the usual objection to female enfranchisement on its head: if women's fitness for the vote was questioned, men too ought to face an examination before voting. She also invoked the London Dock Strike and believed that women could have played a decisive part in it. Her politics joined women's suffrage to working-class education, labour struggle and socialist change.

DOCUMENTED Minnie's letter is direct evidence of her relationship with Lansbury and of political traffic through the O'Brien home. It also makes the broader family tradition of friendship between Frederick and Lansbury much more credible, though it does not by itself prove that the two men were childhood friends.

Family ties across generations

Norah O'Brien remembered going to school with Lansbury's daughter Dolly (Dorothy). Dorothy, a prominent socialist, feminist, and secularist activist, fought for women's suffrage. She was an active member of the Women's Freedom League (WFL) and the National Union of Clerks, where she championed equal pay for equal work. She wrote influential articles for early feminist and socialist journals including *The Freewoman* and *The Clerk*. She also campaigned on social welfare and working-class women's reproductive rights. In 1912, she married fellow politician Ernest Thurtle, who later became a Labour MP.

While her brother remembered that Dolly was opposed to violent protest Sylvia Pankhurst records in her book *The Suffragette Movement* (1931) regarding her sisters that,

- on the 14th February 1913, Daisy Lansbury was accused of catching a policeman by his belt; the charge was dismissed.
- after the 17th February 1913 meeting at the Obelisk, Annie Lansbury joined her and others in breaking an undertaker's window, leading to imprisonment.
- On 5th November 1913, police mistakenly bundled Daisy into a taxi while Sylvia escaped from the Lansbury home in St Stephen's Road.

This is another specific and testable recollection, and it suggests that the relationship was not confined to two political men but extended through the children. Taken with Minnie's letter, it gives the phrase "almost one of the family" a credible social setting: neighbouring households connected by school, meetings, music and socialist work.

A more dramatic family story says that Frederick and Lansbury were in hospital at the same time and had their beds moved together, perhaps until they died. The final phrase cannot be literal. Frederick died at St Andrew's Hospital on 13 January 1940; Lansbury died almost four months later, on 7 May 1940, at Manor House Hospital in Golders Green. They may have overlapped in hospital at an earlier date, or two episodes may have merged in retelling. Hospital registers and contemporary obituaries would be needed to recover the original event.

3. The East London Federation, war and social welfare

The break from the WSPU

Minnie O'Brien's connection with Sylvia Pankhurst's East London movement belongs to a wider story of political division and practical solidarity. The episode is sometimes described as a split within "the suffragettes", but that is too simple: the campaign for women's suffrage included constitutional organisations as well as the militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). The WSPU, founded in 1903 and led by Emmeline Pankhurst with Christabel as its principal strategist, was nevertheless the organisation from which Sylvia's East London work emerged.



Sylvia Pankhurst speaking outside of the old Baker's shop at 198 Bow Road

From 1912 Sylvia built WSPU branches among working women in Bow and neighbouring districts. Their activity soon extended beyond a narrowly electoral campaign: they worked with the labour movement, supported strikers and insisted that political representation had to be meaningful in the lives of women facing low wages, insecure work and poor housing. This approach brought Sylvia into increasing conflict with the WSPU leadership. In January 1914 the leadership instructed the East London branches to form a separate organisation; the resulting East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS) adopted a democratic structure and argued for adult suffrage rather than a limited property-based franchise.

Class was central to the rupture, but it is safer not to attribute to Christabel Pankhurst the precise claim that working-class women were too uneducated or burdened by poverty to campaign. The documented disagreement concerned the East London group's independence, its alliances with labour and socialist causes, and the rival principles of adult versus restricted suffrage. Sylvia's own writing rejected the idea that better-off women should win the vote on behalf of poorer women; political power, she argued, should belong to those whose lives it would affect.

War, food and collective care

The outbreak of war in August 1914 made these differences still sharper. The WSPU ended its militant campaign and Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst threw their energies behind the national war effort. Sylvia and the ELFS opposed the war and continued to campaign for suffrage, but their immediate work was shaped by the economic shock in east London: factories closed, unemployment mounted and food prices rose sharply. Families already living close to the margin came to the Federation's door for help.



Inside the cost price restaurant located in the women's hall

On 31 August 1914 the ELFS opened its first Cost Price Restaurant at the Women's Hall, 400 Old Ford Road, Bow. The name was deliberate. The restaurants were not presented as charitable soup kitchens but as a practical protest against profiteering and as a means of providing good food without humiliation. Contemporary and later accounts record a midday two-course meal at 2d for adults and 1d for children; a penny could buy a simple supper of soup and bread. Those unable to pay could receive tickets

without being publicly distinguished from other diners. Further restaurants followed in Poplar and Bromley.

Food was only one part of the Federation's response. At 400 Old Ford Road, and later at other centres, the ELFS distributed milk and operated services for mothers and children. By 1915 the former Gunmaker's Arms at 438 Old Ford Road had been transformed into the Mother's Arms: a mother-and-baby clinic, milk depot and nursery, with a school conducted on Montessori lines. These initiatives were both relief measures and an attempt to create forms of collective care that treated working-class mothers as citizens rather than as objects of benevolence.

The East London Toy Factory, opened in October 1914 at 45 Norman Road (now Norman Grove), addressed another consequence of the war: unemployment among women. It was organised as a co-operative enterprise, offered paid work and included a crèche. Pankhurst described a workforce of fifty-nine women paid a wage intended to match the contemporary male minimum. The factory began with wooden toys and developed a wider range of dolls and soft toys; goods were sold through Selfridges. It combined economic necessity with a refusal to accept the low pay and cramped conditions that characterised much women's work.

Citizenship and the O'Brien household

The Federation's wartime work matters not because it provides a simple explanation of the franchise settlement of 1918, but because it reveals an enlarged idea of citizenship. The Representation of the People Act gave the parliamentary vote to women over thirty who met qualifying property or marital conditions; it did not enfranchise every woman, and equal voting rights came only in 1928. The ELFS did not alone produce those changes. Its distinctive contribution was to make the claim for political equality inseparable from food, wages, housing, care and the authority of working women to organise their own communities.

For the O'Brien family history, this setting gives proper scale to Minnie's documented association with Pankhurst and Lansbury. It also sets a useful limit on the evidence. Minnie's role in the East London movement can be stated with confidence; Frederick Henry O'Brien's precise views, and Minnie's day-to-day responsibilities in each wartime initiative, should remain open until further contemporary records are found.

4. Minnie Hannah Alice O'Brien: "for the Revolution"



Minnie never married. Family memory presents her as independent, unconventional in dress, energetic in fund-raising and deeply attached to Sylvia Pankhurst. She may at one time have worked as a cigar maker, placing her within the same occupational world as Frederick and Ernest. The claim that she supported the suffragettes from about 1908 is plausible, but the first firm evidence currently located is her 1912 letter to Lansbury. One caution about the name is worth recording for anyone searching after her: she was registered as

Minnie Hannah Alice, while her mother was Alice Maud Mary. The two names transpose easily in family usage, but indexes are unforgiving about forename order, and a search under “Alice Minnie” will fail.

Eva Cottage, Laindon. Back Row: Ethel, Norah. Front Row:
Frederick, Alice, Minnie, Charlie Rendell

Organiser, seller and troubleshooter



Selling the Women's Dreadnought on the Roman Road

Minnie now emerges much more clearly as an organiser and troubleshooter. In a 2026 account, Gillian Murphy, curator at LSE's Women's Library, includes her among Sylvia's “loyal supporters”. Drawing on Sylvia's *The Home Front*, Murphy records that Sylvia first noticed the red-haired Minnie helping at the Women's Hall, 400 Old Ford Road, and remembered that she had suffered rickets in childhood. Minnie was born about July 1880 and would have been thirty-three or thirty-four when the Women's Hall became the Federation's headquarters in 1914. Sylvia's phrase “little Minnie” therefore referred to her stature or appearance, not to a young girl.

The same account notes that Miss O'Brien was conspicuous for selling large numbers of *The Woman's Dreadnought*. A contemporary report adds another apparently mundane but revealing detail: at the movement's Old Cockney Fair on 22 December 1917, Miss O'Brien was one of the women who managed the refreshments. The report names the whole team: “The refreshments, managed by Mrs. Ellis, Mrs. Syme, Mrs. Cox and her sons, Mrs. Edwards, Mrs. Eglinton, Miss O'Brien, Mrs. Harris Thring and other willing members, were generally appreciated.” Those other names are more useful than they look. Minnie is nearly invisible in the movement's records because she is nearly always “Miss O'Brien” without an address, whereas the women beside her can be identified; where their names recur in branch reports, sales lists and subscription columns, she is likely to be in the same paragraph. Newspaper selling, fairs, food service and fund-raising kept the Federation functioning. They required stamina, reliability and a willingness to do work that rarely reached the platform or the official minutes.

SYLVIA'S INSCRIPTION On the drawing entitled “In the Pot Bank” which was given to Minnie and sold at Bonham's in 2002, Sylvia wrote: “To M O'Brien, In remembrance of some of the holes you had us out of.” The words imply trust, affection and repeated practical rescue when arrangements failed.

“Getting us out of holes” is unusually intimate evidence. It suggests that Minnie could find premises, money, supplies, people or protection when the organisation was in difficulty. The exact crises are not named, so those examples remain possibilities rather than facts. The inscription nevertheless identifies the character of her service: she was an indispensable back-room figure, not merely an occasional meeting-goer.

Other notices reinforce that conclusion. A “Miss O'Brien” contributed £1 towards Sylvia Pankhurst's fine in the *Workers' Dreadnought* of 4 January 1919—an amount substantial enough to indicate commitment—and another O'Brien contribution appears in October 1918. The printed list has now been read in full, and it cannot settle the identification. It runs: “Miss McKay, £1; Miss O'Brien, £1; Mrs. Jewson, £1.” There is no address



In the Pot Bank

and no initial. Identification with Minnie remains a strong inference from context and always will be, so the item is not worth further effort.

Some auction descriptions describe Minnie as a co-founder of a London branch of the Women's Social and Political Union. That claim should not be repeated without qualification. The WSPU was founded in Manchester in 1903, and Sylvia's distinct East London organisation developed later around Lansbury and local working-class women. The better-supported description is that Minnie was an early, trusted East London Federation supporter, organiser and troubleshooter.



A separate 1920 item is more intriguing. The Workers' Dreadnought published an article by "F. O'Brien", "Patriotic Ireland: An Open Letter to British Trades Unionists". It attacked wartime patriotism and argued from an explicitly communist and internationalist position. Frederick is a possible author: the surname, initial, Irish family background, trade-union address and Pankhurst connection all fit. But no address or biographical note identifies the writer. Until corroboration is found, it should be treated as an attractive lead, but not as Frederick's confirmed work.

Stories of militancy

The family preserved a vivid story of a woman being carried away from hostile men or police rolled in carpet or linoleum. In one version the woman is Minnie at a Poplar meeting; in another it is Sylvia escaping from the Bow Vestry Hall before going to Cadogan Terrace. Charlie Rendell later recalled tunnels or hiding places beneath a floor when living in her former home. These memories capture a real historical atmosphere: Sylvia was repeatedly arrested under the "Cat and Mouse" regime and supporters physically protected her. But the precise episode has not been matched to a contemporary report, and the shifting identity of the woman is a warning against presenting the story as settled fact.

A check made in August 2026 sets a firmer limit on how far the militancy stories can be pressed. To administer the amnesty of August 1914, when suffrage prisoners were released and outstanding proceedings dropped, the Home Office compiled a bound alphabetical index of everyone arrested for suffrage activity since 1906: 1,224 women and 109 men, each entry cross-referring to the original arrest and conviction papers. It survives at The National Archives as HO 45/24665, and it has now been transcribed in full and published free of charge by the Women's Suffrage Resources database, so the whole list can be searched by surname without a visit to Kew. Every entry under the letter O occupies a single page—Oates, Offord, Ogilvey, the two O'Kells, Olden, Oldham, Oliver, O'Mahoney, O'Mahony, Orage and Owen—and there is no O'Brien of either sex.

A negative is only as good as the record it rests on, so the list was tested against people known to have been arrested in the same streets. Annie Lansbury, George Lansbury and William Arthur Lansbury all appear. East London is not missing from this index; the Bow arrests are in it, and Minnie is not.

DOCUMENTED No person surnamed O'Brien appears in the Home Office index of suffrage arrests, 1906–1914. Two limits should be stated plainly. The index closes at the August 1914 amnesty, so it says nothing about the war years, the anti-conscription work or the Workers' Dreadnought period, when Minnie was demonstrably active. And suffragettes sometimes gave false names on arrest; nothing suggests Minnie did, but this record cannot close that possibility by itself.

Within those limits the finding is worth having, because it removes a whole class of speculation. Minnie was not a prisoner, not a hunger-striker, not a window-breaker. What it leaves is the figure Sylvia's inscription already describes, now confirmed from an independent direction: the person who got the organisation out of holes rather than into them. That is not a diminishment. It is a different kind of service, needed at least as badly and remembered rather less well.

FAMILY TESTIMONY The carpet or linoleum escape should be retained as a labelled oral tradition. Its changing details are historically informative: they show how the family remembered itself as a place of refuge within a movement accustomed to surveillance, re-arrest and physical confrontation. The militant reading of the story is now the weaker one, since no arrest followed for any O'Brien before August 1914. Whoever was carried out, no charge came of it.

Did Minnie have a vote?

The Representation of the People Act 1918 gave the parliamentary vote to women of thirty who were themselves local government electors—that is, occupiers of land or premises of £5 annual value—or who were married to one. The qualification was framed around household standing, not age alone.

Minnie turned thirty-eight in 1918. She was unmarried and, so far as the family record shows, living in her father's house at 106 Cadogan Terrace. On the face of it she did not qualify: single daughters at home were precisely the group the Act left out. If that is right, the woman who rebuked the men of Bow in 1912 for not troubling to vote, and who proposed that men too should sit an examination before being allowed one, waited until 1928 and her forty-eighth year for a vote of her own. It would be a hard irony, and it should not be asserted until it is checked. Two things could unsettle it. If she paid rent as a lodger in her own name, or if she was already the occupier of Eva Lodge at Laindon, she may have qualified after all.

PRIORITY SEARCH The Poplar and Bow electoral registers for 1918, 1919 and 1929, at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives. This is a short and decisive search, and it belongs near the top of the list, alongside the search for the hall.

Red Cottage and the end of the friendship

Minnie is remembered as helping at Sylvia's Red Cottage tea-room in Woodford, with Alice and Ethel supplying cakes. The chronology is sound. Sylvia opened the tea-room in summer 1923, first renting and then buying Vine Cottage at 126 High Road, Woodford Wells; she lived there with the Italian anarchist Silvio Corio and remained until moving to Charteris Road in 1929. Contemporary advertisements offered tea and music in the garden and also advertised a Sunday discussion circle. Richard Pankhurst confirms the tea shop in his book of 1979, though he dates the move to Red Cottage, Woodford Green, to 1924 rather than 1923; a son writing more than fifty years later is not necessarily a better guide to the date than local property research, and both are recorded here rather than reconciled. The existing detailed

history of Red Cottage names other workers but not Minnie, so her own role remains a credible family recollection awaiting documentary confirmation.

A second branch of the family remembers the tea-room independently. Ethel's daughter Betty recalled her mother's belief that Minnie ran a tea shop with Sylvia Pankhurst, and that the arrangement ended when Sylvia became friendly with another woman. The teller marked her own doubt: her grandfather had no recollection of it. Two branches recalling the same episode is not proof, and the detail about the friendship matches nothing documented about the Woodford household. It does strengthen the recollection that Minnie was there, which the published history of Red Cottage neither confirms nor contradicts.

The family also remembered a rupture. A newspaper's sensational description of Sylvia's son Richard, born in December 1927, as an "eugenic baby", and Sylvia's refusal to marry, reportedly provoked Frederick. The phrase is not an invention of later memory: the national press used it in April 1928. Family accounts say Frederick told Minnie to choose between the family and Sylvia. Whether that ultimatum ended the friendship permanently is uncertain, but the timing and newspaper language are independently corroborated.

5. The hall, the paintings and the question of which hall

The paintings are the family's strongest material connection to Sylvia Pankhurst. Ten works from the O'Brien descendants were sold at Bonhams in 2002; two entered the Parliamentary Art Collection and one Leicester Museums. The broad provenance is secure. Sylvia's works passed into the O'Brien family and remained there for decades. The unresolved question is what property or service they paid for.

What the family says

The earliest and best-placed account is Elsie O'Brien's. She was Ernest Frederick's daughter and Frederick Henry's granddaughter, so she was writing about her own father and her own grandfather. Writing to the Daily Telegraph on 13 March 2002, eight days after the Bonhams sale and a month after the report that provoked her, she set out the arrangement in a single sentence: her aunt Minnie "knew Sylvia Pankhurst because she used a hall in Old Ford Road, Bow, for meetings, which my father and grandfather hired out and were given pictures by her in lieu of payment for its use." She was writing to correct a description of her aunt she thought unjust and a suggestion about her mother she thought false, not to burnish a provenance: the sale was over and the pictures were gone. That is the best position from which a family witness can speak.

Her sentence does four things at once. It names the men. It places the hall in Old Ford Road. It states the terms. And it records that most of the pictures "appeared in Richard Pankhurst's book about his mother". That last claim has now been checked and is correct, though what the book actually shows is not what was expected of it. The finding is set out below.

Two further traditions carry weight. Katie O'Brien's note of 22 April 2020 comes from three generations down—she is Michael's daughter, Michael was Malcolm's son, and Malcolm was Ernest Frederick's—and the distance shows. It preserves a different version of what the pictures paid for, that Sylvia took a room in the O'Brien household and could not pay the rent, and then follows the collection forward through Ernest's estate to Molly Cook, who had them framed. It is unusually candid about its own gaps, querying its own points as it makes them; its observation that only Ernest and Norah are named in the probate notice is exactly right, and the notice she found is Frederick Henry's administration of March 1940. Ethel's

recollection, transmitted by her daughter Betty, belongs mostly to section 4. All three are printed in full in the appendix.

What the published evidence says



A rally outside the Women's Hall. The building sadly no longer exists

Three published statements bear on this, and they are best set out in order of date, because the order turns out to matter. Jacqueline Mulhallen's 2009 account of the rediscovery of the paintings identifies Ernest O'Brien as the landlord of a hall rented by Sylvia and records that, when short of money, she gave him a painting in lieu of rent; Ernest's family preserved a collection of her work after his death. Mulhallen names no premises. The Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee's website is more definite: "Ernest O'Brien, the landlord of the building known as the Women's Hall, Old Ford Road, Bow, which Sylvia rented as the headquarters of the East London Federation of Suffragettes between 1914 and 1924." The page carries no citation for that statement. Bonhams' 2024 catalogue entry adds that Ernest was introduced to Sylvia by

Minnie; auction provenance is supplied by the vendor, which in this case means the family.

Set side by side, these are almost certainly one stream rather than three. The 2002 sale brought the pictures and the family's account into public view. Mulhallen's article rests on the descendants and on that sale. The website post-dates both, cites neither, and is the only one of the three to name the building; the dates it gives, 1914 to 1924, are the dates any writer would take from a standard account of the Women's Hall, and read as context supplied by the author rather than as anything reported from a document. The specificity increases as the account moves further from its source, which is the wrong direction for evidence to travel.

The family testimony is older than any of them and says only that Frederick and Ernest hired out a hall, and that pictures came instead of payment. What all the strands agree on is an O'Brien, a hall and payment in art. They do not agree on an address, because only the latest and least supported of them supplies a building—and the witness closest to the event supplies a street and stops there. One earlier source might have been expected to carry the story and does not. Richard Pankhurst's book of 1979 thanks the O'Briens for the loan of their pictures and says nothing of a hall, a landlord or rent.

OPEN OR INFERRED The identification of the hall as 400 Old Ford Road rests on a single uncited secondary statement, downstream of an account that named no premises. This is not a reason to abandon the identification. The Women's Hall is the obvious candidate, and an informed writer may have had good private reason for naming it. It is a reason to stop calling it the stronger provenance, and to stop letting it govern the choice between 400 and 438.

Which Ernest? The question is closed

Version 1.05 recorded the identity of the Ernest as open, and proposed to close it from the family tree. Elsie's letter had in fact answered it already. Her aunt was Minnie, so her father was one of Frederick Henry's sons; and it was her father, with her grandfather, who hired out the hall. William Brian sailed for New York in November 1915 and stayed there. The only other son is Ernest Frederick. The grandfather is

Frederick Henry, which agrees with the family wording already recorded here and with Katie O'Brien's account of the pictures descending through Ernest's estate.

FAMILY TESTIMONY The Ernest of the published provenance is Ernest Frederick O'Brien, Frederick Henry's son, and the second man is Frederick Henry himself. Two routes converge on him. Elsie O'Brien described the hirers as her father and her grandfather; and Molly Cook, whose grandfather the published account names as the recipient of the paintings, was Ernest Frederick's granddaughter through his son Malcolm. The elder Ernest of Brooklyn is out of the question on either reading. What remains unproved is not the man but the arrangement: no record has yet been found of any O'Brien holding or keeping a hall.

The family tree confirms it from the other end. Ernest Frederick had two grown children, Elsie and Malcolm. Malcolm married Dorothy, and their daughter Molly became Molly Cook, the vendor of the 2002 sale. The Memorial Committee's page says the paintings were given to Molly Cook's grandfather; her grandfather was Ernest Frederick. The published statement and the family testimony name the same man by different routes, and the free check proposed in version 1.05 has now been made. What the tree cannot do is turn testimony into record. It names the man without establishing the arrangement.

Landlord, or hall keeper?

The family's own formulation deserves to keep its original looseness. To hire out a hall is not the same claim as to own one. It is what a hall keeper does: hold the keys, take the bookings, collect the letting money, often for an owner who lives somewhere else. That is an ordinary role for a respectable working man with a local reputation, and it fits a cigar maker's household a good deal better than a head lease on a building seating several hundred people. Section 7 already describes Ernest's occupational history as compatible with the published description of an Ernest O'Brien as landlord or hall keeper. The looser reading should be allowed to survive here too, because it changes what to look for. A hall keeper leaves no trace in a rate book. He appears, if at all, in a directory entry, in a hall's own letting book, or in the minutes of a chapel, institute or club.

It also loosens the premises. If the memory is that they hired out a hall, the hall need not be either 400 or 438 Old Ford Road. Bow and Old Ford had a good many halls attached to chapels, institutes, schools and clubs, and Sylvia's organisation hired rooms constantly.

Which hall? The candidates

Before the candidates, a coincidence of dates that has been sitting in plain sight. The Memorial Committee's page says Sylvia rented the Women's Hall as headquarters "between 1914 and 1924". The Woman's Dreadnought began on 8 March 1914 and the Workers' Dreadnought ended on 14 June 1924. The range given for the tenancy is the publication run of the newspaper, to the year. Version 1.05 suspected those dates were context supplied by the author rather than anything reported from a document. This is the context they were taken from.

The paper's own mastheads point the same way. The issue of 4 January 1919 gives 400 Old Ford Road, E.3, with 152 Fleet Street for business and publishing; by the issue of 19 March 1921 the Old Ford Road address has gone and only Fleet Street remains. A published account of the Mothers' Arms at 438 gives its working life as 1915 to 1920. Whatever the legal position of any lease, the Federation's centre of gravity had left Old Ford Road within about two years of the armistice, at the point when it had become a small

communist party, when the Dreadnought had become a national rather than a local paper, and when Sylvia was in Holloway from October 1920 until May 1921.

That bears on the rent question set out below. If pictures went to a landlord in lieu of rent late rather than early—after Norah Smyth's inheritance had been spent, which is when an arrears arrangement makes most sense—then the years in which such an arrangement is most likely are the years in which 400 Old Ford Road is least likely to be the premises. The two inferences pull against each other, and both cannot be pressed at once.

OPEN OR INFERRED The range 1914 to 1924, attached to the Women's Hall tenancy by the only source that names the building, reproduces the publication run of the Dreadnought and cannot be treated as evidence of a tenancy. On the mastheads, the Federation's Old Ford Road address lapses between January 1919 and March 1921. None of this excludes 400 for the war years. It does mean 400 cannot be the automatic answer for the years after them.

The candidates below are not rivals to be ranked once and for all. The family remembers an arrangement, and an arrangement may have moved from one room to another over ten years.

Property	Known use	O'Brien link	Present judgement
400 Old Ford Road Women's Hall	Headquarters of Sylvia's East London organisation from 1914, and the Dreadnought's address on the masthead until at least January 1919.	Named as the hall only by the Memorial Committee's uncited page. Elsie O'Brien attests the street and not the building.	Leading candidate for about 1914 to 1919, on plausibility rather than provenance. Weaker thereafter: the masthead address lapses by March 1921, and the "1914 to 1924" range is the newspaper's run.
438 Old Ford Road Mothers' Arms	Former Gunmakers Arms taken over in 1915 for maternity, welfare and childcare work; a published account gives its working life as 1915 to 1920.	No located rate, licence or tenancy record connects an O'Brien to the property. A published list of licensees for 1871–1914 names none.	Secondary. The licensee list is a weak negative: such lists are incomplete, it stops in 1914, and a licensee is the tenant rather than the owner.
Another room or hall in Old Ford Road itself	A long and densely built street. The Federation's world ran along it: Israel Zangwill at 288, meetings held in Mrs Fischer's house at 304, the Hall at 400, the Mothers' Arms at 438.	Satisfies Elsie O'Brien's wording exactly—a hall in Old Ford Road, hired out by her father and grandfather—without requiring either of the famous numbers.	Open, and the least tested of the candidates. A letting room over a shop, a chapel schoolroom or a club room would leave no trace under 400 or 438. Not yet searched at all.
A hall elsewhere in Bow	The Federation hired rooms constantly, and used Bow Baths at 555–559 Roman Road, Bow Palace at 156 Bow Road and Bromley Public Hall.	None sought. Would require the street in Elsie's letter to be a later gloss, the Federation's own address standing in for the venue.	Open, but weaker than the row above, since it sets aside the one piece of family testimony that names a street.

Property	Known use	O'Brien link	Present judgement
106 Cadogan Terrace Family home	O'Brien residence and a demonstrated political contact point.	Katie O'Brien's 2020 account says Sylvia took a room in the household and paid in pictures when she could not pay the rent.	Strong as social setting, and a complete alternative explanation rather than a garbled form of the hall story. Cadogan Terrace lies a few minutes from Old Ford Road, which is why the two versions blur; the proximity settles nothing either way.

The two Old Ford Road properties served different functions and should not be conflated. No. 400 was the Women's Hall and political headquarters; no. 438 was the former Gunmakers Arms, renamed the Mothers' Arms and used during the First World War for social welfare. On present evidence 400 remains the more likely of the two for the war years, because it was the organisation's headquarters, because Minnie was working there when Sylvia first noticed her, and because it was the building Sylvia most needed to keep—not because the provenance establishes it. What has changed is that neither number should any longer crowd out the plainest reading of the family's own words. Elsie said a hall in Old Ford Road. Old Ford Road held a great deal more than two buildings, and none of the others has been looked at.

The 1940 grant of administration describes Ernest Frederick as a licensed victualler, and he ran the Station Arms at Southminster. That settles the Southminster sense of the word and nothing else: he was the landlord of a public house, landlord of premises rather than landlord to a tenant, and it should never be cited as though it bore on Bow. It cuts the other way as well, which is easy to miss. A licensed victualler makes his living by taking premises, holding a tenancy and paying rent on it. The 1901 census entry as a cigar maker is not the obstacle it first appears; it is a young man's occupation. The interesting question is what he was doing between 1901 and the tenancy he evidently held at Southminster.

Who was paying the rent?

One further tension is worth testing rather than dismissing. Published accounts credit the financing of the Women's Hall in 1914 to Norah Smyth, who put in her own inheritance, and to Henry Devenish Harben, a wealthy backer of the Federation. If the rent on 400 was being met from their funds, an arrangement in which the landlord took a picture in lieu of rent sits a little awkwardly. It does not exclude it: Federation finances were desperate for most of the decade and Smyth's money did not last. But it points to something specific to look for. If pictures were going to a landlord instead of rent, that is likelier late in the tenancy than in 1914, and likelier still once Smyth's resources were exhausted. A date for the paintings would test it, and the pictures themselves may carry one. The chronology above adds a second constraint pulling the other way. A late arrangement is the more likely on the financial evidence and the less likely at 400 Old Ford Road, which is a reason to look harder at the other candidates rather than to force a date.

The Cadogan Terrace recollection

The family separately remembers that Sylvia at one time rented a room in the O'Brien household at 106 Cadogan Terrace. That recollection should be recorded clearly, not silently merged with the Old Ford Road hall. Minnie's 1912 letter proves that the house was already known as a local political contact point, which makes a temporary room or lodging plausible. The recollection can also coexist with the hall arrangement:

Sylvia might have used a room at Cadogan Terrace at one period and rented a hall from an O'Brien at another. What the paintings' provenance establishes is the arrangement rather than the address, so Cadogan Terrace cannot be ruled out as the setting of at least some of it.

Katie O'Brien's note of 2020 is the fullest version of it: Sylvia took a room in the household, could not pay the rent, and paid in paintings. That is a complete alternative explanation of the pictures rather than a footnote to the hall story, and it comes from the branch that watched the collection pass on to Molly Cook. Elsie's account and Katie's are not reconcilable by choosing a winner. They may both be true of different periods, or one may have absorbed the other in retelling—Cadogan Terrace and Old Ford Road are a few minutes apart, and the drift could have run in either direction.

A provenance with conflicting family memories

The descendants' accounts differ over whether the paintings were ever at risk of destruction, and the tree makes the disagreement sharper than it looked. Molly Cook told the press in 2002 that her grandmother threw them out and that she and her future husband recovered them. Elsie O'Brien wrote the following month to reject the suggestion that her mother intended to burn them. The two are describing the same woman—Ernest Frederick's wife, Elsie's mother and Molly's grandmother—and they are aunt and niece. Katie O'Brien's note preserves a third version, in which it is Ernest himself who had no use for them and was going to burn them, and she marks her own doubt with a question mark.

Three tellers, three culprits, and each names someone a step further from herself than the last. That is a recognisable pattern in family stories about near-loss, and it is reason to hold the burning motif lightly whoever it is attached to. What none of them disputes is that the pictures were in the household, that nobody much wanted them, and that they survived. These contradictions concern a later episode in the pictures' custody, not the earlier fact that they had entered the family through its relationship with Sylvia.

The route they took can now be given a fixed point, though the years around it remain a reconstruction. Katie presumes the pictures came to Ernest Frederick by inheritance, and the probate notice she found, naming only Ernest and Norah, is Frederick Henry's administration of March 1940, which fits. Molly's account of a rescue and Elsie's account of a handing over are most economically read as the same event from two sides — a gift as Elsie saw it, a rescue as Molly did — and since Molly's version involves her future husband, it must precede her marriage. What is documented is that by 1979 the numerous pictures were with Malcolm and Dorothy, Molly's parents, and Molly herself had one they had given her. Katie, a generation further on, was unsure whether her grandfather Malcolm or Molly took them: the 1979 record suggests the answer is both, in sequence. Afterwards the collection came to Molly, who framed them and kept them in her cottage; a large torso of a woman stayed with Dorothy and was never sold, and two were in Katie's own household. Ten were sold at Bonhams on 5 March 2002.

Elsie's statement about the 1979 book has now been tested, and it holds. Richard Pankhurst's *Sylvia Pankhurst: Artist and Crusader*, published by Paddington Press in 1979, reproduces a large number of his mother's pictures, and its acknowledgments record that he was "indebted to Malcolm and Dorothy O'Brien who permitted the photographing of the numerous pictures in their possession; to their daughter Molly Cook for an additional one they had given her". The collection was therefore photographed and published twenty-three years before the Bonhams sale. Ownership of individual illustrations is not recorded anywhere in the book, so no particular plate can yet be tied to a particular O'Brien picture.

Three things follow. The first is that the family tree is now confirmed in print by a source outside the family: in 1979 Molly Cook is described as the daughter of Malcolm and Dorothy O'Brien. Taken with

Malcolm's descent from Ernest Frederick, that puts the identification of the Ernest on a printed footing independent of the 2002 sale and of the Memorial Committee's page altogether.

The second is that Elsie was wrong, or at least loose, about the custody. She wrote that the pictures "remained in my possession until I handed them over to Molly Cook and her boyfriend". In 1979 the numerous pictures were with her brother Malcolm and his wife Dorothy, and the single picture Molly then owned had been given her by her parents, not by her aunt. This is worth stating plainly rather than smoothing over, because it is exactly the division the note on evidence predicts. Elsie is reliable on the relationship — whose father, whose grandfather, what was owed — and unreliable on sequence and possession, which is where family memory ordinarily fails.

The third is that the hall story is absent. Richard Pankhurst had direct access to the O'Brien family in the 1970s, thanked them by name, and recorded nothing about his mother renting a hall from them or paying for it in pictures. This is a negative and a weak one: acknowledgments are not the place for provenance, and he was writing about his mother's art rather than tracing how each picture had travelled. But it removes the hope that the 1979 book would carry the tradition back before 2002. On present evidence the hall, the landlord and the rent make their first appearance in print in February 2002, and the pictures make theirs in 1979 without them.

A further family heirloom

A further family heirloom belongs to the same history, and it carries more weight than it has so far been given. A gateleg table, believed to be Victorian or possibly earlier, descended through Charlie Rendell and is now owned by his grandson. Family tradition says that Sylvia Pankhurst gave or traded the table in lieu of rent. No contemporary record yet confirms the transaction, and it is not known whether the rent concerned a hall, a room at Cadogan Terrace or some other arrangement. The point that matters is the line of descent. Charlie Rendell married Ethel Lilian, so the table came down a different branch of the family from the one that held the paintings. Two objects, two branches, the same tradition of Sylvia paying in kind for the use of premises: that is the nearest thing in the whole file to independent family attestation. It corroborates the relationship—a rent owed to an O'Brien and settled in goods—considerably better than the printed sources corroborate the address. The two questions are worth keeping apart, because their evidential strength is not the same.

6. Music in the O'Brien household

Music is not decorative background to this story. It appears at the point where domestic life and political organisation meet. Minnie's 1912 letter expected a comrade to play and sing at Sunday meetings. People called at Cadogan Terrace asking whether music would be available. The family remembered Frederick playing the cello and requiring every child to learn an instrument. In this household, music was education, sociability and a means of building a political audience.

Eva: a documented music teacher



Eva O'Brien

The strongest external confirmation is a London trade directory. In 1914 "O'Brien Miss Eva, 106 Cadogan terrace NE" appears under teachers of music and singing. Eva Mary Anne O'Brien, known in the family as Florrie, is remembered as a pianist who died in 1915 aged about twenty-nine. The directory proves that at least one O'Brien daughter turned the family's musical culture into public, professional work. Eva Lodge at Laindon, built by Frederick with Charlie Rendell and later inherited by Minnie, preserved her name in the family landscape.

William Brian O'Brien: London to Binghamton, New York State

George Lansbury's Christian socialism included a persistent opposition to war. He opposed the Boer War and, as editor of the *Daily Herald*, gave a sustained public voice to opposition to the First World War, conscription and militarism. In 1935 he resigned the Labour leadership after the party supported League of Nations sanctions against Italy over Abyssinia; Lansbury believed even economic sanctions could become a form of warfare and lead to armed conflict. The O'Brien family's close association with Lansbury makes it plausible that Frederick sympathised with this radical and pacifist outlook, particularly if the Workers' Dreadnought article is confirmed as written by him. Minnie's 1912 letter to Lansbury is direct evidence of the family's political connection; Frederick's own precise views on war are not yet documented and should not be assumed.

Frederick's youngest son William O'Brien married Helen Peever on 4 February 1915 and arrived in the United States on the SS California in November 1915, aged twenty-six. The passenger manifest names Uncle Ernest O'Brien, of 4002 Fourth Street, Brooklyn, as the intended host or sponsor for William and Helen. This was not Ernest Frederick O'Brien, William's brother: Uncle Ernest was Frederick's younger brother Ernest, one of two brothers—Ernest and Alexander—already established in America. William travelled during the Derby Scheme, when men of military age were under intense pressure to attest for later service. His move therefore occurred before compulsory service began for eligible unmarried men on 2 March 1916 and before its extension to married men in May.



William (Brian) O'Brien

A message from Lynne O'Brien supplies a more direct family explanation of the move. She reports that her father said William—known as Brian in America—left Britain because he was a pacifist, initially hoping to settle in South Africa but ultimately travelling to New York. This is important family testimony and makes pacifism more than a purely chronological conjecture. It does not, however, disclose William's own words or exclude the practical attractions of the established New York family network and a musical career. The most balanced conclusion is that pacifist conviction and opportunity may both have shaped the decision.

A surviving family brochure for the O'Brien School of Music at 211 Court Street, Binghamton, presents the renamed Brian as a violinist and former teacher at the Lyric School of Music and London County Council schools. It claims study with Leopold Auer and European teachers, a special scholarship, and graduation from Trinity College of Music. His wife is described as a pianist with Carl Rosa Opera Company experience and qualifications from several London institutions.

A 1980 family letter adds that Brian played in a theatre orchestra for George M. Cohan before moving to Binghamton, where he and his wife established the school. These details are rich but derive from promotional and family sources. Passenger manifests, Binghamton city directories, newspapers and music-college registers can test them. Even before that work is done, the brochure demonstrates how the family wished to present itself: trained, cosmopolitan and professionally musical.

Lynne also reports that the Binghamton school was successful until the Great Depression sharply reduced demand for music lessons. She knew of no political activity by William or Helen in the United States, and records that three of their sons later served in the American armed forces. Those details appropriately qualify any assumption that the family's London radicalism continued unchanged in America.

William and Helen's children in America

The following family-supplied chronology identifies the seven children of William and Helen. It should be read as a useful working record pending confirmation from American birth and death certificates, censuses, obituaries and military files.

Child	Reported birth and death	Family note
Frederick Brian	Born and died in New York, 1916.	Died in infancy.
Eva Alice	New York, 1917 – 2001, Red Bank, New Jersey?	Gene O'Brien recalled that, at about twelve, she visited England with her brother Fred and met their cousin Malcolm O'Brien.
Frederick Brian	New York, 1919 – 1999, Ocala, Florida.	The second son to bear his father's and eldest brother's names.
Brissette	Binghamton, 1921 – 2010, Atlanta, Georgia.	
Bertrand Howard	Binghamton, 1924 – 1999, Albuquerque, New Mexico.	
Yvette Jacqueline	Binghamton, 1927 – 2008, Binghamton.	
Eugene Carlson	Binghamton, 1928 – 2017, Spring Hill, Florida.	

Paderewski at Cadogan Terrace?

The most glamorous tradition says that Ignacy Jan Paderewski—the celebrated Polish pianist and later prime minister—visited the O'Brien home. The story is possible. Paderewski was a London sensation from his 1890 debut and returned repeatedly; the O'Brien household had professional musicians and political connections. But possibility is not corroboration. No diary, concert-party list, newspaper item, letter or photograph has yet been found linking him to Cadogan Terrace.

FAMILY TESTIMONY Retain the Paderewski visit as a named family tradition, strengthened by the independently documented musical household but still unproved. The best search window is likely the 1890s to early 1910s, when Eva and William were at home and Paderewski's London appearances were frequent.

7. The wider family

Family relationships relevant to this article

Generation	People	Relevance here
Parents of Frederick	John Gregory O'Brien and Ann, formerly Nicholson	Established by Frederick's 1858 birth certificate.
Frederick's generation	Frederick Henry O'Brien (1858–1940); brothers Henry Thomas (1862–1943), Ernest (born 1864) and Alexander James, later Brian (1866–1934)	Earliest known family emigrants to the United States: Ernest in Brooklyn; Alexander later associated with Binghamton.
Frederick's household	Frederick Henry O'Brien (1858–1940) and Alice Maud Mary Blaikie (1854–1937); children including Minnie (1880–1958), Ethel Lilian (1884–1970), Ernest Frederick (1885–1959), Eva (1886–1915), William Brian (1889–1977) and Norah (1891–1989)	The Bow household at the centre of the article.
American branch in this article	William Brian O'Brien (1889–1977) and Helen Peever (1892–1981)	Married 4 February 1915; arrived November 1915. Manifest names Uncle Ernest, 4002 Fourth Street, Brooklyn.
Ernest Frederick's line	Ernest Frederick O'Brien (1885–1959); his children Elsie and Malcolm; Malcolm and his wife Dorothy; their children Molly, later Molly Cook, and Michael; Michael's daughter Katie	The branch through which the paintings descended, and the source of the Elsie and Katie testimonies. Molly Cook was the vendor of the 2002 sale; her

		descent names the Ernest of the published provenance.
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The O'Brien children carried different parts of the household culture into adult life. Norah stayed at school until sixteen, worked in the London jewellery trade and remembered her father's insistence on education. Ethel Lilian married Charlie Rendell at St Mary, Stratford Bow, on 18 August 1923; she and Alice are remembered supplying cakes for Minnie's suffrage work. Ernest Frederick worked as a cigar maker and later became a licensed victualler, running the Station Arms at Southminster. His occupational history is compatible with the published description of an Ernest O'Brien as landlord or hall keeper, and both the family testimony and the family tree now identify him as the man: Elsie O'Brien, his daughter, described the hirers of the hall as her father and her grandfather, and Molly Cook, whose grandfather the published account names, was his granddaughter through his son Malcolm. That is testimony rather than record, but the ambiguity the published sources leave is gone. Nor is his later trade the objection it might appear to be: a man whose adult career consisted of taking licensed premises and paying rent on them is not an implausible candidate for having held or kept a hall at an earlier stage.

Frederick's brothers in America

Frederick's younger brothers Ernest O'Brien (born 1864) and Alexander James O'Brien (1866–1934, later known as Brian) are the first members of this family currently known to have emigrated to the United States. Their migration created the New York and Binghamton connections that later received William and Helen in 1915. The details below combine family information with a cemetery identification; where no contemporary record has yet been consulted, they should remain provisional.

Ernest O'Brien is thought to have emigrated after the 1881 census. Family notes identify him as a cigar maker, and an email from Gene O'Brien dated 11 October 2001 identifies him as the "Uncle Ernest" with whom William and Helen were to stay in Brooklyn. The passenger manifest gives Ernest's address as 4002 Fourth Street, Brooklyn. No later life record has yet been located, so his date of death and the exact course of his American life remain open.



Alexander James O'Brien, later Alexander James Brian, is thought to have emigrated after the 1871 census. Norah O'Brien remembered at least one return visit, while Elsie recalled his involvement with the Salvation Army in America. The date and reason for dropping the 'O' and adopting the spelling Brian are not known. Family memory also refers to his son Alec. Alexander's burial is recorded in Chenango Valley Cemetery, Broome County, New York, near Binghamton, where the next generation of the family later made its musical home.

Minnie remained the clearest political bridge between generations and organisations. Later memories of her eccentric clothes, lodgers, ladders (during the second world war she had some Americans lodged with her, and my mother remembered that she climbed in and out on a ladder to avoid disturbing them) and life at Eva Lodge belong to the texture of her biography, even though they do not prove her movement role. She should not be reduced either to Sylvia's physically unflattering description or to a colourful family eccentric. The archival Minnie organised, wrote, sold newspapers, ran refreshments, gave money, discussed votes and strikes, and repeatedly helped Sylvia's organisation through practical difficulties.

8. What can now be said with confidence

Claim	Evidence	Assessment
Minnie knew Lansbury closely by 1912.	Her signed letter from 106 Cadogan Terrace, written the day after his by-election defeat.	Documented
The O'Brien home was used in local political organising.	Minnie says people called at the house about meetings and music.	Documented
Minnie was an East London organiser and troubleshooter.	Sylvia's recollection and inscription, newspaper sales, the 1917 fair report, donations and family testimony. No arrest record survives for her in the Home Office index to August 1914.	Strong—and non-militant in the legal sense
No O'Brien was arrested for suffrage militancy between 1906 and August 1914.	The Home Office index compiled for the 1914 amnesty, HO 45/24665, transcribed in full. Three Lansburys appear in it; no O'Brien of either sex does.	Documented
Minnie ran the refreshments at the Old Cockney Fair, 22 December 1917.	The printed report of the fair, which names her alongside six other women.	Documented
The "Miss O'Brien" of the fine list of 4 January 1919 is Minnie.	The entry carries neither address nor initial: "Miss McKay, £1; Miss O'Brien, £1; Mrs. Jewson, £1."	Highly likely in context; this item cannot settle it
The carpet or linoleum escape happened as remembered.	Family testimony in two versions, one naming Minnie and one Sylvia. No arrest of an O'Brien is recorded before August 1914.	Family testimony; the militant reading now weaker
Minnie was enfranchised in 1918.	Not yet tested. A single woman of thirty-eight in her father's household would not normally qualify under the 1918 Act.	Open—a priority search
Minnie helped run Sylvia's tea-room at Woodford.	Family recollection, now from two branches: the account in section 4, and Ethel's belief as remembered by her daughter Betty. The teller's grandfather did not recall it, and the published history of Red Cottage names other workers. The tea shop itself is confirmed by Richard Pankhurst in 1979, who dates the move to Red Cottage to 1924; Minnie's part in it is not mentioned.	Family testimony from two branches; unproved
Frederick was personally close to Lansbury.	Consistent family testimony plus Minnie's demonstrated family-level connection.	Highly plausible
They had known one another since boyhood.	Compatible ages and geography, but no childhood record or contemporary reminiscence yet found.	Open
The paintings were payment for use of O'Brien property.	Consistent family tradition and published provenance naming an Ernest as landlord, together with two objects—the paintings and the gateleg table—descending through two different branches of the family.	Strong; a primary record of the arrangement is still lacking

Claim	Evidence	Assessment
The hall was in Old Ford Road.	Elsie O'Brien's letter of 13 March 2002, describing a hall in Old Ford Road, Bow, hired out by her father and grandfather. She names no building, and was writing eight days after the sale.	Family testimony—the street, not the premises
The relevant property was the Women's Hall at 400 Old Ford Road.	Only one published statement names the building. It is uncited, later than the accounts it draws on, and downstream of Mulhallen, who names no premises; the range it gives, 1914 to 1924, is the publication run of the Dreadnought. Elsie O'Brien attests a hall in Old Ford Road but names no building. No primary tenancy record has been located.	Open or inferred—the leading candidate for the war years, on plausibility and not on provenance
The Federation held 400 Old Ford Road continuously from 1914 to 1924.	The range comes from the only source that names the building and matches the Dreadnought's publication run exactly. The masthead gives 400 Old Ford Road in January 1919 and 152 Fleet Street alone by March 1921.	Open or inferred—the range cannot be used as evidence of a tenancy
The Ernest of the published provenance is Frederick's son, Ernest Frederick.	Elsie O'Brien's letter of 13 March 2002 describes the men who hired out the hall as her father and her grandfather; Minnie was her aunt, William Brian had emigrated in 1915, and the only other son is Ernest Frederick. Independently, Molly Cook—named by the published account as the granddaughter of the recipient—was Ernest Frederick's granddaughter through his son Malcolm. Molly Cook's parentage is independently documented in the 1979 book, which names her as Malcolm and Dorothy O'Brien's daughter.	Family testimony—closed from two directions
The paintings passed from Ernest Frederick to Elsie, and from Elsie to Molly Cook.	Elsie's letter for the second step, Katie O'Brien's note, less certain, for the first. The 1979 acknowledgments cut across both: the bulk of the collection was then with Malcolm and Dorothy, and Molly's one picture was their gift, not Elsie's.	Open or inferred—Elsie's account of the custody does not fit the 1979 record
Ernest Frederick O'Brien was a licensed victualler.	The grant of administration of Frederick's estate, 30 March 1940; he ran the Station Arms at Southminster.	Documented
Sylvia rented a room at 106 Cadogan Terrace.	Family recollection; the house is documented as a political contact point, but no tenancy record is known.	Plausible, unproved
The paintings paid for that room rather than for a hall.	Katie O'Brien's note of 22 April 2020, from the branch that watched the collection pass to Molly Cook. It is a complete alternative explanation of the pictures, not a variant of the hall story.	Family testimony—unreconciled with Elsie's account
The paintings were reproduced in Richard Pankhurst's book of 1979.	The book has now been seen. It reproduces a large number of Sylvia's pictures and its acknowledgments thank Malcolm and Dorothy O'Brien for permitting the photographing of "the numerous pictures in their possession". Ownership of individual illustrations is not recorded, so no single plate can yet be matched to a named picture.	Documented—with that limit

Claim	Evidence	Assessment
In 1979 the collection was in the possession of Malcolm and Dorothy O'Brien.	The printed acknowledgments of the 1979 book, which also describe Molly Cook as their daughter and record that the single picture she then owned was a gift from them.	Documented
Richard Pankhurst knew of the hall, the landlord or the rent.	He thanks the O'Brien family by name in 1979 and records nothing of any of it. Acknowledgments are not the place for provenance, and the book is about his mother's art rather than the travels of each picture.	Documented as an absence—a weak negative, but the hall story has no attestation of any kind before February 2002
Frederick wrote in the Workers' Dreadnought as F. O'Brien.	Name, politics and context fit; no identifying address or biography.	Possible, unproved
Paderewski visited 106 Cadogan Terrace.	Family tradition, made plausible by the documented musical household.	Unproved

9. Recommendations for further research

The following are recommendations for further research. They concentrate on records capable of changing the interpretation, rather than simply adding more names. The first three are the most consequential, and the first two cost nothing beyond time, a library ticket and a stamp.

1. **Recommendation. Close the questions that cost nothing. The first of these has been closed: Molly Cook was Ernest Frederick's granddaughter through his son Malcolm, so the Ernest of the published provenance is named and no record office visit is needed for it. Three remain. Read Mulhallen's 2009 article in full, including its endnotes, downloadable free from the Women's History Network; what matters is not her sentence but her footnote, because if she cites a descendant by name that person is the source of the whole tradition and everything downstream is repetition. Write to Jacqueline Mulhallen, who is contactable through Lynx Theatre and Poetry: she rediscovered the paintings and spoke to the family, and will know both what she was told and by whom. Ask the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee what their source was for naming the Women's Hall; if the answer is Mulhallen, the apparent double attestation collapses to one and this article should say so.**
2. **Recommendation. Carry on from the 1979 book. Its acknowledgments have been read and the result is in section 5: the pictures are there, the custodians of 1979 were Malcolm and Dorothy O'Brien, and the hall is not mentioned. Three things follow from it. Tom Evans, who took most of the photographs, is thanked for making "careful notes of any inscriptions" and for suggesting a tentative chronology of the pictures, neither of which the book prints; those notes would bear directly on the dating question raised below and possibly on Sylvia's inscription to Minnie, and they should be sought with Richard Pankhurst's working papers. Obtain the Bonhams catalogues for 5 March 2002 and 27 November 2024 and check whether the lot entries cite the 1979 book as literature, since a plate reference would tie individual pictures to the book at last. And read Will**

Bennett's Daily Telegraph report of 14 February 2002 in full rather than through Elsie's reply: on present evidence that article is the first appearance anywhere of the hall, the landlord and the rent, which makes its wording and its named informant unusually important.

3. **Recommendation.** Test the hall arrangement and the alternatives. For 400 Old Ford Road, inspect Poplar and Bow rate books, electoral registers, leases and deeds from 1913 to 1924 for Ernest or Frederick O'Brien. Add the Valuation Office survey of 1910–15 at The National Archives—the IR 58 field books, located through the IR 121 plans—which records owner, occupier, tenure, rent and term for every property in the country at exactly the right date; this is the purpose-built instrument for the question, and the earlier reference to “valuation records” should be made explicit as this. Then check licensing and compensation papers for the Gunmakers Arms and Mothers' Arms at 438. Because the family wording is that they hired out a hall, the search should not stop at those two addresses: directory entries, hall letting books and the minutes of local chapels, institutes and clubs are where a hall keeper leaves a trace. For Southminster, consult Kelly's Directory of Essex for 1922, 1929 and 1933 and the registers of alehouse licences for the petty sessional division at the Essex Record Office, Chelmsford; dating the start of the Station Arms tenure sets a limit on how late Ernest Frederick could still have been letting a hall in Bow. Two additions follow from the chronology in section 5. Record the office address printed in the first issue of the Dreadnought for each year from 1917 to 1924; the run is free online, this dates the Federation's departure from Old Ford Road within an afternoon, and the reference that appears to read “Bow People's Hall” in the issue of 4 January 1919 can be checked against the page image at the same time. And consult the Post Office and Kelly's directories for Old Ford Road from about 1910 to 1925, listing every hall, institute, club room and public room in the street and looking for an O'Brien as a hall keeper. The rate books and the Valuation Office field books should then be worked from the street rather than from the number: a survey of Old Ford Road looking for O'Brien is likelier to succeed than a survey of 400 Old Ford Road looking for a tenancy that may never have been his.
4. **Recommendation.** Establish whether Minnie had a vote. Consult the Poplar and Bow electoral registers for 1918, 1919 and 1929 at Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, and look for her as an occupier or lodger in her own right, at Cadogan Terrace or at Eva Lodge. It is a short search with a decisive result either way, and it bears directly on how the 1918 Act is described in section 4.
5. **Recommendation.** Complete the remaining O'Brien civil-record spine. Frederick's birth certificate has now established his birth at 8 Upper Chapman Street, St George in the East, on 25 April 1858, and named John Gregory O'Brien, cigar maker, and Ann, formerly Nicholson. John Gregory's 1878 remarriage certificate has named his father, John O'Brien, boiler maker. Obtain Frederick's marriage certificate, Alice's records and the six children's birth certificates, then build a census and electoral-register table from 1881 to 1939 for 73 and 106 Cadogan Terrace. This should clarify the Irish connection and changes in each child's work.
6. **Recommendation.** Search the Lansbury and Pankhurst correspondence by name and address. In LSE's Lansbury papers, inspect neighbouring items around Minnie's 1912 letter and search for O'Brien, Cadogan Terrace, Ernest, Eva and Norah. In the International Institute of Social History's

Sylvia Pankhurst papers, search the same terms plus Women's Hall, rent, landlord, paintings, Red Cottage and Mothers' Arms. Add to the Amsterdam search Richard Pankhurst's own working papers for the 1979 book, and Tom Evans's photographs and inscription notes: the book records that Richard Pankhurst deposited paintings and drawings at the Institute, so it is the natural place for the working material to have gone.

7. **Recommendation.** Trace the paintings transaction. Obtain the complete 2002 and 2024 Bonhams lot files, condition reports and provenance statements; compare them with Jacqueline Mulhallen's research notes if preserved. Identify which descendant supplied each account and construct a custody timeline from Ernest or Frederick to Elsie, Dorothy, Molly Cook and the sale. Try also to date the pictures themselves: if they were painted or given late in the tenancy, that fits an arrangement made after Norah Smyth's money had run out, and the dating bears directly on the rent question.
8. **Recommendation.** Test Frederick's labour and authorship record. Search membership and branch records of the Cigar Makers' Mutual Association and the National Cigar and Tobacco Workers' Union at the Modern Records Centre, Warwick. Search every digitised Dreadnought issue for F. O'Brien and compare political vocabulary, local references and any address with Frederick's biography.
9. **Recommendation.** Build Minnie's movement chronology. The newspapers are now free. The Woman's Dreadnought for 1914 to 1917 is on the Internet Archive with searchable text, and the complete Workers' Dreadnought from 28 July 1917 to 14 June 1924 is held as page images at marxists.org; between them they cover the whole decade. Search the run for O'Brien, beginning with sales lists and the fair report of 22 December 1917, then branch reports, donations, social events and Red Cottage notices. Because she almost always appears without an address, search also for the women named beside her at the fair—Mrs Ellis, Mrs Syme, Mrs Cox, Mrs Edwards, Mrs Eglinton and Mrs Harris Thring—since where their names recur she is likely to be in the same paragraph. It is slower than searching for her directly, but it is the method that will work. The arrest records need not be searched again: HO 45/24665 has been checked and contains no O'Brien. Local press and police files remain worth checking for the carpet or linoleum episode and the Bow Vestry Hall meetings.
10. **Recommendation.** Document the musical careers and American network. Verify Eva's directory entries across multiple years. Preserve and cite the 1915 passenger manifest naming Uncle Ernest at 4002 Fourth Street, Brooklyn, then search Brooklyn and Binghamton directories, local newspapers, theatre-orchestra notices, Trinity College registers, Salvation Army records and any papers of the O'Brien School of Music. Obtain or index American civil records, obituaries and military-service files for William and Helen's seven children, including the three sons said by Lynne O'Brien to have served in the United States armed forces. These records can test the brochure's claimed qualifications and clarify the separate American lives of Ernest, Alexander, William and the next generation.
11. **Recommendation.** Investigate Paderewski narrowly. Create a dated list of Paderewski's London visits between 1890 and 1914, then search concert programmes, correspondence, society columns

and visitor books for O'Brien, Cadogan Terrace, Eva or William. A targeted chronology is more likely to succeed than a general name search.

12. **Recommendation.** Preserve and identify oral-history witnesses. For each recollection, record who said it, when, their relationship to the event, and whether they witnessed it or heard it from someone else. Digitise the O'Brien School of Music brochure, letters, photographs, obituaries and any inscriptions on the paintings or frames.

Conclusion: a family inside the movement

The O'Brien story matters because it restores the household infrastructure of radical politics. George Lansbury and Sylvia Pankhurst were public figures, but their work depended on people who opened rooms, collected money, made cakes, played music, circulated news and provided refuge. Frederick's craft background and socialism, Alice's domestic support, Eva's professional music, William Brian's transatlantic musical household and its seven children, and Minnie's organising and crisis-solving all belong to one connected history.

Minnie's 1912 letter is the hinge. It places her at 106 Cadogan Terrace, in Lansbury's political world, immediately after one of the most audacious pro-suffrage elections in British history. Its mixture of grief, humour, meeting arrangements and music makes the family tradition recognisable in documentary form. It does not prove every story. It proves something more important: the O'Briens were participants, not spectators. That Sylvia paid an O'Brien in kind for the use of premises is well supported, by two objects descending through two branches of the family. Which Ernest is no longer open, and is closed from two directions: Elsie O'Brien called him her father, and Molly Cook, whose grandfather the published account names, was his granddaughter. Which premises is still open, and rather more open than version 1.05 allowed. Elsie O'Brien gave the street and not the building, and the only account that names the building is uncited and carries a date range borrowed from a newspaper's run. Sylvia's reported room at Cadogan Terrace remains a distinct family recollection and a complete alternative explanation of the pictures, not a variant of the hall story. The library shelf has now been reached, and it gave a divided answer. The pictures are indeed in Richard Pankhurst's book of 1979, in the keeping of Malcolm and Dorothy O'Brien, so the published record of the collection is twenty-three years older than the sale. The published record of the hall is not: the book that had the best opportunity to carry that story says nothing of it, and the tradition still makes its first appearance in print in February 2002. The pictures are older than anyone assumed; the explanation of them is not.

Sources and research notes

This list records the principal material used for the present draft. Family papers should be given stable filenames, dates and custodial details before publication.

1. **O'Brien family-history notes supplied for this article.** Includes recollections attributed to Charlie Rendell, Norah O'Brien and descendants; emails dated 2001 and 2020; an extract from a 1980 letter; and transcriptions of civil/probate material.
2. **Minnie O'Brien to George Lansbury, 27 November 1912.** George Lansbury papers, LANSBURY/6, folios 261–262, LSE Library Digital Collections. The digitisation occupies three photographed sides. [Online source](#)
3. **UK Parliament, "George Lansbury: A Suffragist By-Election".** Context for Lansbury's resignation and the Bow and Bromley contest of 26 November 1912. [Online source](#)
4. **UK Parliament, "Start of the suffragette movement";** London Museum, "Sylvia Pankhurst: Suffragette, artist, activist"; Katherine Connolly, "East Side Londoners: Sylvia Pankhurst's lecture tours of North America and the East London Federation of Suffragettes", in *The Politics of Women's Suffrage* (University of London Press, 2021), especially the discussion of the January 1914 separation; and

- E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (Longmans, Green, 1931). Together these establish the WSPU's place within the wider suffrage movement and document the 1914 separation. Online sources
5. **E. Sylvia Pankhurst**, *The Home Front: A Mirror to Life in England During the First World War* (Hutchinson, 1932); Emma Swan and Vasiliki Psarikidou, "Working women demand peace and food": Gender and class in the East London Federation of Suffragettes' food politics, *Gender, Work & Organization* 31 (2024), DOI: 10.1111/gwao.13000; East End Women's Museum, "The Women's Hall: East End suffragettes"; and London School of Economics Digital Library catalogue, record for the Women's Hall and Cost Price Restaurant, 400 Old Ford Road. These support the account of wartime economic pressure, restaurant practice and the Hall's welfare role. Online sources
 6. **London Museum**, "Suffragette teddy bears: First World War & women's rights", sections on the East London Toy Factory and the Mother's Arms; and Sylvia Pankhurst website, "Campaigner", summarising Pankhurst's account of the toy factory, its workforce and wage. These identify 45 Norman Road, the crèche, 438 Old Ford Road and Montessori schooling. The commercial outlet located was Selfridges, not Liberty's. Online sources
 7. **UK Parliament**, "1918 Representation of the People Act" and "Women get the vote". These make clear that the 1918 settlement was partial and that women achieved voting equality with men only in 1928. Online sources
 8. **Gillian Murphy**, "In the Pot Bank: Sylvia Pankhurst's drawing of women workers". Friends of the Women's Library, 6 March 2026. Connects Minnie with the Women's Hall, newspaper sales and Sylvia's inscribed drawing. [Online source](#)
 9. **Workers' Dreadnought**, volume 4, number 39, 22 December 1917. The Old Cockney Fair report names Miss O'Brien among the women who managed the refreshments, with Mrs Ellis, Mrs Syme, Mrs Cox, Mrs Edwards, Mrs Eglinton and Mrs Harris Thring. Online source [Online source](#)
 10. **The Workers' Dreadnought**, volume 5, number 41, 4 January 1919. The subscription list towards Sylvia Pankhurst's fine reads in full: "Miss McKay, £1; Miss O'Brien, £1; Mrs. Jewson, £1." No address or initial is given, so the entry cannot by itself identify Minnie. Online source [Online source](#)
 11. **F. O'Brien**, "Patriotic Ireland: An Open Letter to British Trades Unionists". *Workers' Dreadnought*, 4 December 1920. The identification with Frederick remains unproved. [Online source](#)
 12. **Jacqueline Mulhallen**, "Sylvia Pankhurst's Paintings: A Missing Link". *Women's History Magazine*, no. 60 (Summer 2009), especially pp. 35–36. Cited here at second hand; the full text and its endnotes have not yet been obtained and are a research priority, since the endnotes may name the descendant from whom the whole tradition derives. Online source [Online source](#)
 13. **Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee**, "Resources". Summarises the ten-work 2002 sale, names Ernest O'Brien as landlord of the building known as the Women's Hall and records two Parliamentary acquisitions. The page carries no citation for the identification of the building, post-dates both the 2002 sale and Mulhallen's article, and describes the paintings as having been given to Molly Cook's grandfather. It gives the date of the sale as 5 March 2002, and the range 1914 to 1924 for the tenancy, which is the publication run of the *Dreadnought*. Consulted 17 and 18 August 2026. Online source [Online source](#)
 14. **Gerard Greene**, "Sylvia Pankhurst in Woodford". Redbridge Museum & Heritage Centre research on Red Cottage, including tenure, advertisements, workers and the 1928 press coverage. [Online source](#)
 15. **London trade directory, 1914**. Entry for "O'Brien Miss Eva, 106 Cadogan terrace NE" under teachers of music and singing. [Online source](#)
 16. **Archives Hub, Tobacco Workers' Union collection**. Confirms that the National Cigar and Tobacco Workers' Union was formed in 1918 from predecessor bodies. [Online source](#)
 17. **Hansard**, "Tributes to Mr Lansbury and Sir Terence O'Connor", 8 May 1940. Contemporary parliamentary notice following Lansbury's death. [Online source](#)
 18. **"The East London Pub Taken Over by Suffragettes"**. *Londonist*, 24 August 2022; secondary account identifying 438 Old Ford Road as the former Gunmakers Arms taken over in 1915. [Online source](#)
 19. **English Heritage**, "Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960)". Confirms the Red Cottage tea-room and Sylvia's life with Silvio Corio. [Online source](#)
 20. **Will Bennett**, "Sylvia Pankhurst, militant suffragette and talented artist". *Daily Telegraph*, 14 February 2002, and Elsie O'Brien's letter in reply, 13 March 2002; both transcribed in the supplied family notes, and neither yet checked against the original newspaper pages. Elsie's letter is the earliest first-hand family statement of the arrangement. It describes a hall in Old Ford Road, Bow, hired out by her father and grandfather, pictures given in lieu of payment for its use, her denial that her mother meant to burn them, her handing of the collection to Molly Cook, and her statement that most of the pictures appeared in Richard Pankhurst's book about his mother. It is quoted in full in the appendix. On present evidence Bennett's article is the earliest appearance in print of the hall, the landlord and the rent.
 21. **Birth certificate of Frederick Henry O'Brien**, 25 April 1858, St George in the East; supplied family copy. Names John Gregory O'Brien, cigar maker, and Ann O'Brien, formerly Nicholson, of 8 Upper Chapman Street.
 22. **Marriage certificate of John Gregory O'Brien and Elizabeth Livingstone, née Tyrell, 1878**; supplied family copy. Names John O'Brien, boiler maker, as the groom's father.
 23. **O'Brien family marriage record: William Brian O'Brien and Helen Peever, 4 February 1915**; supplied family information. The passenger manifest and American directory evidence remain recommended sources for his subsequent move and career.
 24. **Bonhams**, "A Head Study of a Girl", sale entry, 27 November 2024. Later auction provenance states that Ernest was introduced to Sylvia by Minnie. The claim that Minnie co-founded a London branch of the WSPU is not adopted here because it is unsupported and appears historically doubtful.
 25. **Gene O'Brien**, email, 11 October 2001; **Lynne O'Brien**, message, 26 July 2026; and later family information. Identifies Uncle Ernest O'Brien as the Brooklyn host named on the 1915 passenger manifest; records family recollections about Alexander, William's

emigration, the music school and William and Helen's descendants. These details remain recommended for independent verification.

26. The National Archives, HO 45/24665: the Home Office index of suffragettes arrested between 1906 and 1914, comprising 1,224 women and 109 men, compiled to administer the amnesty of August 1914. Consulted through the Women's Suffrage Resources database, which has transcribed and published it free of charge alongside the 1866 suffrage petition. Searched by surname on 17 August 2026: no O'Brien of either sex appears; Annie, George and William Arthur Lansbury do. Online source
27. The Woman's Dreadnought, digitised issues 1914–1917, Internet Archive, collection per_workers-dreadnought; and the Workers' Dreadnought, 28 July 1917 to 14 June 1924, page-image PDFs at marxists.org. Between them these cover the whole period of Minnie's movement activity and are freely available, so the search recommended in section 9 no longer requires a paid newspaper archive. Online sources
28. Representation of the People Act 1918, sections 4(1) and 4(3), on the women's local government and parliamentary franchise. The qualification was framed around household standing rather than age alone. Online source
29. Spartacus Educational, "East London Federation of Suffragettes", on the financing of the Women's Hall by Norah Smyth and Henry Devenish Harben; and East End Women's Museum, "The Women's Hall" and "About the Women's Hall", neither of which names an owner, landlord or lessor of the building. Online sources
30. Pubs History, "Gunmakers Arms, 438 Old Ford Road, Bow E3". Licensees between 1871 and 1914 are given as Hopkins, Carter, Stebbings, Freeman, Arthy, Stephenson, Branch, Seabourn, Gill and Dodd; no O'Brien or Brien appears. A weak negative, since such lists are incomplete and a licensee is the tenant rather than the owner, but consistent with the treatment of 438 as the secondary alternative. Online source
31. Katie O'Brien, family note, 22 April 2020, and the recollection of Ethel as remembered by her daughter Betty; both in the supplied family notes and both quoted in full in the appendix. Katie's note preserves the Cadogan Terrace version of the arrangement and the later custody of the pictures; Ethel's preserves the tea-shop tradition, the eccentric dress, and the wartime lodgers at Eva Lodge.
32. Richard Pankhurst, Sylvia Pankhurst: Artist and Crusader (Paddington Press, 1979). Consulted 18 August 2026. The acknowledgments thank Tom Evans, who took most of the photographs, made careful notes of any inscriptions and suggested a tentative chronology for the pictures; and record the author as "indebted to Malcolm and Dorothy O'Brien who permitted the photographing of the numerous pictures in their possession; to their daughter Molly Cook for an additional one they had given her". Ownership of individual illustrations is not recorded, no chronology is printed, and there is no mention of a hall, a landlord or rent. The book does note that Red Cottage, Woodford Green, to which Sylvia moved in 1924, was used as a tea shop.
33. The Workers' Dreadnought, volume 5, number 41, 4 January 1919, and volume 8, number 1, 19 March 1921; masthead and imprint addresses, consulted through the page images at marxists.org. The 1919 issue gives 400 Old Ford Road, E.3, with 152 Fleet Street for business and publishing; the 1921 issue gives Fleet Street alone. The apparent reference to a "Bow People's Hall" in the 1919 issue comes from an automated reading of the page and has not been verified against the original.
34. Roman Road LDN, "Sylvia Pankhurst life and works in Bow, East London", for the sequence 198 Bow Road, 321 Roman Road, Bow Baths at 555–559 Roman Road, 400 Old Ford Road, 45 Norman Grove and the Mothers' Arms at 438 Old Ford Road, whose working life it gives as 1915 to 1920; and Spitalfields Life, "The East End Suffragette Map", for 288 and 304 Old Ford Road, Bow Palace at 156 Bow Road and Bromley Public Hall. Both are secondary accounts, used here only to establish that Old Ford Road and Bow held meeting places other than the two famous numbers.
35. Research Note 01, "Minnie Hannah Alice O'Brien and the Home Office arrest index", and Research Note 02, "Ernest Frederick O'Brien and the tenancy of 400 Old Ford Road", both 17 August 2026; and Research Note 03, "A hall in Old Ford Road: the weight of family testimony, and the alternatives to the Women's Hall", 18 August 2026. These record the checks on which the revisions in versions 1.05 and 1.06 rest, and identify the searches in section 9 that have not yet been made.

Appendix: three family testimonies

These are the family accounts on which sections 4 and 5 chiefly rest. They are given as received, without correction of spelling, punctuation or the tellers' own queries, because the hesitations are part of the evidence. None of them is a document contemporary with the events described; all of them are older than the printed accounts that repeat them. The tellers stand at different distances from the events. Elsie O'Brien was Ernest Frederick's daughter and Frederick Henry's granddaughter. Katie O'Brien is Ernest Frederick's great-granddaughter, through his son Malcolm and Malcolm's son Michael. Betty reports her mother Ethel, who was Minnie's sister.

Elsie O'Brien, letter to the Daily Telegraph, 13 March 2002

SIR – You quote Sylvia Pankhurst's claim in her autobiography that my aunt, Minnie O'Brien, had a pinched face and rickets (report, Feb. 14).

In fact, she came from quite a comfortable family and was well fed and well educated by her father, a cigar maker in Whitechapel, who played the cello and made sure all his children played musical instruments.

My aunt knew Sylvia Pankhurst because she used a hall in Old Ford Road, Bow, for meetings, which my father and grandfather hired out and were given pictures by her in lieu of payment for its use. Most of these appeared in Richard Pankhurst's book about his mother.

At no time did my mother intend to burn them. They remained in my possession until I handed them over to Molly Cook and her boyfriend.

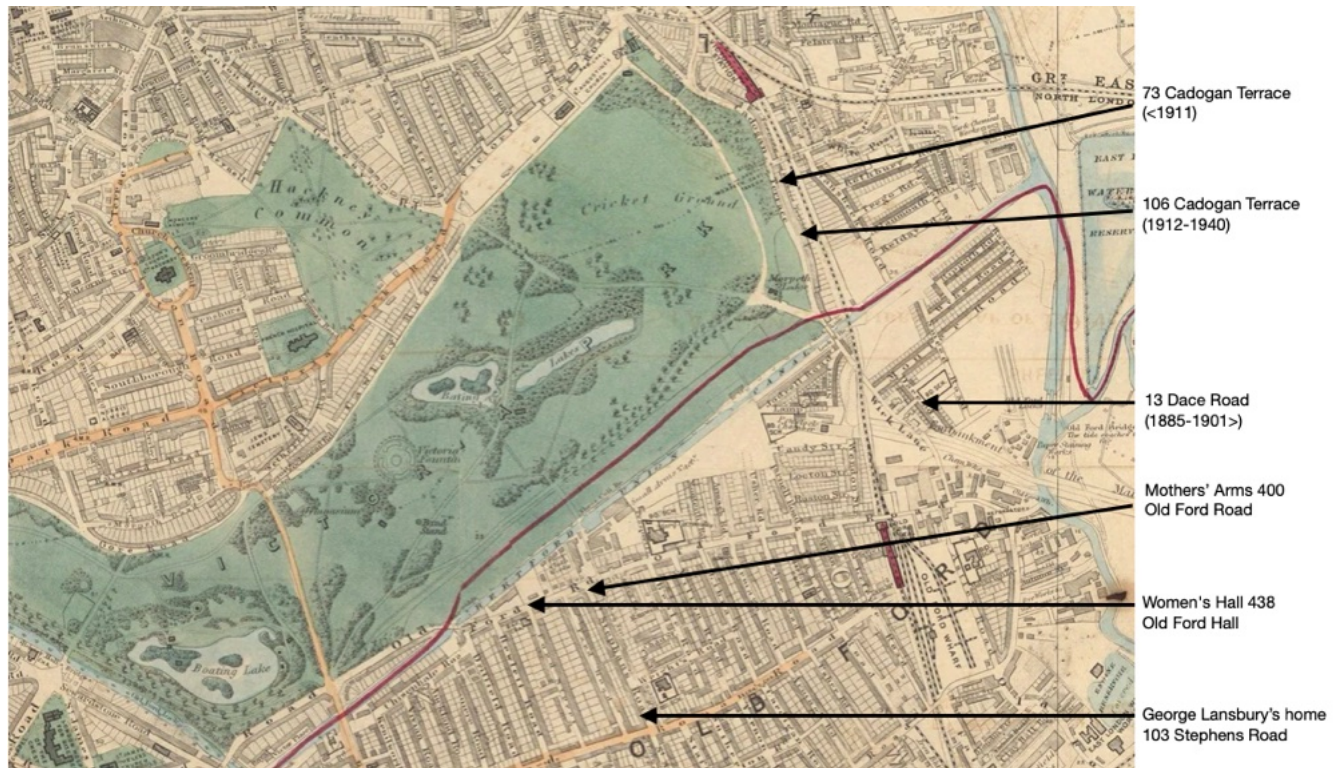
Katie O'Brien, family note, 22 April 2020

The Pankhurst connection/myth? this end is, as follows: Sylvia took up a room in the O'Brien household and was unable to pay rent, so paid in paintings. They seem to have been in Ernest's possession (inherited, I'm presuming, I found only he and Norah are named in probate newspaper document?) and the story is, that he had no use for them, was going to burn them(?), so don't know if g.dad Malc took them or Molly (though she may not have been old enough at this stage!?). But apparently, no one was interested in them! Molly had them all framed and they were so well placed in her cottage. Nanny Dorothy had the large torso of woman painting (don't know where that went as it wasn't sold) and we had the 2 I'd previously mentioned, one of which I scribbled on as a toddler!

Ethel, as remembered by her daughter Betty

Minnie knew me as a young child. Wore eccentric gypsy clothes. My mother thought she ran a tea shop with Sylvia Pankhurst, this ending when Sylvia became friends with another woman, but my Grandfather had no recollection of this. During second world war she had some Americans lodged with her. My mother remembers that she used to climb in and out on a ladder to avoid disturbing them.

Orientation



1891 Map of Victoria Park

The Author

A longtime Ipswich Town FC supporter, Mike grew up on the East Coast in what he likes to describe as the East Anglian part of Essex, but now lives in Cheshire, not far from Manchester. A Fellow of the Chartered Insurance Institute, after 40 years in Commercial Insurance, he began a second career as a student. In September 2021 he completed with Distinction his Masters in Kingdom Theology from Westminster Theological Centre (WTC) accredited by the University of Chester. His dissertation, supervised by Dr. Lucy Peppiatt, was titled *Simone Weil's Soteriology in relation to her Doctrine of Creation: As a response to the question "Where is God?" in a Suffering World*. Mike has been active in the George MacDonald Society since 1995 and is co-editor with Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson of *Informing the Inklings* (Winged Lion Press, 2018). From December 2019 to April 2025, he acted as co-Chair of the Society and continues serving as Treasurer. If you have any corrections or new information about the O'Brien family, you can contact me at mjpartridge@gmail.com.



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