APPENDIX I

EXTRACTS FROM KITTY MARION’S PRISON RECORDS

The National Archives holds files (HO 144/599/184276) relating to the criminal activities of the suffragettes, including details of sentences, discharge and release, conduct, hunger striking and force feeding, and twice, or three-times, daily medical reports to the Home Office. The KM reports relate to imprisonments in Newcastle, Birmingham and Holloway prisons.

The following digest is from the period KM spent in Holloway Prison following her conviction for the Hurst Park Racecourse fire (July 1913–April 1914).

On 4 July 1913, KM was admitted to Holloway Prison and began a hunger strike.

13 July: the doctor’s report reads: ‘She still shows the effects of recent hunger strike and gets easily exhausted on exertion.’

15 July: ‘Rather bad night. Odour of malnutrition in breath. Pulse 75. … Complains of gastric pains & says she feels weak. … very languid. No urgent symptoms.’

16 July: ‘Pulse 85. … Well marked odour of malnutrition. Appears generally weaker & said she felt faint during the night and took a little brandy.’

17 July: ‘Pulse 106 – rather thin. Certainly weaker. She has … attacks of vertigo when she sits up. Well marked odour of malnutrition. Certainly should not be detained beyond today.’

KM was discharged on 17 July under the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act 1913, for three days. In the Bow Street police’s view, ‘she should be continually watched to prevent her doing fresh mischief’.

19 July: Prison Minutes: ‘She is one of the most dangerous fire-lighters and it is useless to release her and trust to Police to be able to prevent her escape.’ And: ‘She is a good subject for forcible feeding.’ Gives height 5’ 5” and weighs on Feb. 3 ‘nearly 11 stone.’ Signed by Dr H. Smalley, Dr Craig, Dr Forward.

9 January 1914: ‘General conduct: very bad. In the evening she barricaded her cell door with bed and chair, and it had to be forced open with crow bars. Later she set fire to her mattress and sheets. During the night she was under supervision of special officer and this precaution will be continued. … Fed last evening with [oesophageal] tube. Struggled violently and made desperate efforts to vomit … last night walked about her cell from 1.40 am to 4 am. She was resting and apparently asleep before and after.’

11 January: ‘Her struggles are much less.’

14 January: ‘Reported as reading in bed from 9.30 pm to 11.45. Afterwards she was quiet and appeared asleep.’
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23 January: ‘Gives vent to a few groans and shrieks when the feeding is over; due in my opinion to vexation at the successful completion.’

28 January: ‘Remarked “I am afraid I don’t feel bad enough to be discharged.”’

29 January: ‘It is worth noting that the screaming which has been called attention to in previous reports has become louder and more pronounced since Mr Marshall’s legal visits to 3234 P[hyllis] Brady who occupied an adjoining cell.’

30 January: ‘No struggling and very little shrieking.’

31 January: ‘screamed and threw her arms about when feeding was over’.

3 February: ‘no struggling and shouting less marked’.

4 February: ‘shouted a little after feeding’.

By the end of February, sleeplessness was being reported.

20 February (and other dates): ‘v. restive most of night. Non-resistive but hysterical after feeding.’

18 February: ‘Fed again this evening – rejected about 3 oz of food – very hysterical after feeding and smashed all crockery.’

Dr Forward reports that KM ‘expressed her regrets afterwards’. He ‘deprecates changing the pattern of her cell utensils at present as it might excite the woman’. He does not think it likely that she will do it again.

5 March: as she is not retaining weight, the medical officer decides to force-feed three times a day.

12 March: ‘Bright and cheerful this morning.’ Regularly refuses to be weighed or examined. Periodically refuses to exercise.

24 March: ‘Rather hysterical during feeding.’ ‘Quiet after feeding.’

27 March: ‘She is still a fair weight for a woman of her size [137 lbs, down from 151 lbs] and build and it is unaccompanied by loss of vigour. … Makes every endeavour to obstruct the passing of the tube.’

29 March: ‘Feeding occupied nearly 30 minutes.’

6 April: ‘still contracts throat muscles’.

9 April: ‘says she feels “seedy” and is in rather a sullen mood’.

13 April: ‘More than usually troublesome.’

14 April: special report by medical officer gives details of force-feeding and vomiting.

This lack of assimilation of food is showing itself in loss of weight – lassitude – colour of face becoming more pallid – diminution of fat tissue, most noticeable about the face, neck and temples, and general loss of energy. In addition the officers inform me she is getting much more depressed than formerly, and I have myself noticed she is quieter and more emotional at times, culminating in hysterical outbursts at the termination of feeding. I thought she was more despondent than usual this morning, and was crying during the process of feeding. She has
previously told the Principal Hospital Officer that ‘one morning she would come into her cell and find her hanging to the grating.’ In view of this statement I have placed a special officer to watch her at night.

15 April: ‘Fed oesophageal tube – very emotional and hysterical – vomited several ozs a short time after feeding.’ ‘She has now lost 2 stone in weight since Jan 6 and after each meal vomits a certain proportion of her food … She is very hysterical after feeding.’

16 April: ‘Restless during night. Took some breakfast this morning on being told she would be released. She was/very emotional [sic: ‘very’ inserted] when told. General condition much the same, except she is brighter.’

KM was discharged on temporary licence on 16 April to return on 23 April. She did not return. The court was informed on 24 April.

The file also includes a cutting from the labour movement paper the Daily Herald (17 April 1914: 4/5), headlined, ‘Forcibly fed 232 times. Woman begs Doctor to finish it by giving her Poison. More on McKenna’s Barbarity.’ The cutting reports that Kitty Marion ‘states that so great did the repeated physical and mental agony become that she felt she would have to put an end to it by hanging herself. … she will probably never regain her normal health and strength.’ A hand-written note added in October 1915 reads: ‘very robust now’.