



The Speaker's Art Fund

VOTE100



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT



UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN

**ENGLISH &
CREATIVE WRITING
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY**



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

For more on the suffrage campaign and the war:
www.parliament.uk/whatdifference

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This exhibition forms part of a wider project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council that involves academics at the University of Lincoln, the University of Plymouth and Parliament's Vote 100 project. It builds on previous research exploring the links between the ongoing wartime suffrage campaign and women's votes.

Vote 100 is Parliament's project to celebrate the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which gave all men and some women the vote for the first time, in 1918.

Cover image: How much more effective my work
would be if my hands were unfettered!

Detail from front page of *Votes for Women*,
21 August 1914. © LSE Library.



WHAT DIFFERENCE DID THE WAR MAKE?

World War One & Votes for Women



HOW DID THE SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES RESPOND?

By 1914, there were more than 50 suffrage societies across the UK. At the outbreak of war militancy ceased, but peaceful campaigning continued.

Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst turned their attention to patriotism and ordered members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) to stop all militant actions.

Millicent Garrett Fawcett, leader of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) called for peace, and the NUWSS focused its attention on supporting organisations that were helping victims of war at home and abroad.

Charlotte Despard of the Women's Freedom League (WFL) was a pacifist. The WFL suspended militancy but continued to campaign for suffrage throughout the war.

Suffrage societies that remained active include the United Suffragists, the Church League for Women's Suffrage and Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS). The latter opposed the war on socialist and political grounds and was against conscription and wartime restrictions on free speech.

The International Women's Suffrage Alliance represented the pacifist voices of women in 26 countries. In April 1915 over 1300 women met at The Hague for the International Women's Congress, and resolutions were made calling for peace, co-operation and equality.



IWSA Brooch – Brooch from the International Women's Suffrage Alliance with the motto 'Jus Suffragii' – Atria Institute on gender equality and woman's history

WSPU badge – Enamel and metal pin badge, © Parliamentary Archives LCR/7/1

NUWSS badge – Tin pin badge, © Parliamentary Art Collection WOA S745

WFL badge – Enamel pin badge, LSE Library

SEIZING THE INITIATIVE

'An adequate representation of the work undertaken by the various Women's Suffrage Organizations of Great Britain during the progress of the war would... be almost of an encyclopaedic nature' **Lady Randolph Churchill**, *The Feminist in War Time*, 1916

At the start of the war, many women and men were thrown out of work. The WFL and the ELFS were joined by new organisations started by suffragist women, including the Women's Emergency Corps and the Women's Service Bureau. They ran cost price canteens, nurseries and hostels, provided interpreters for refugees, started workrooms and toy factories, organised fundraising entertainments, trained women for new jobs, and distributed food and clothing parcels.

The war made women workers and volunteers visible in public space. Women Police Service volunteers were on the streets of towns across the UK, patrolling outside munitions factories, railway stations and YMCA huts, and many industries employed women workers for the first time in jobs previously done by men who had been called up to fight.



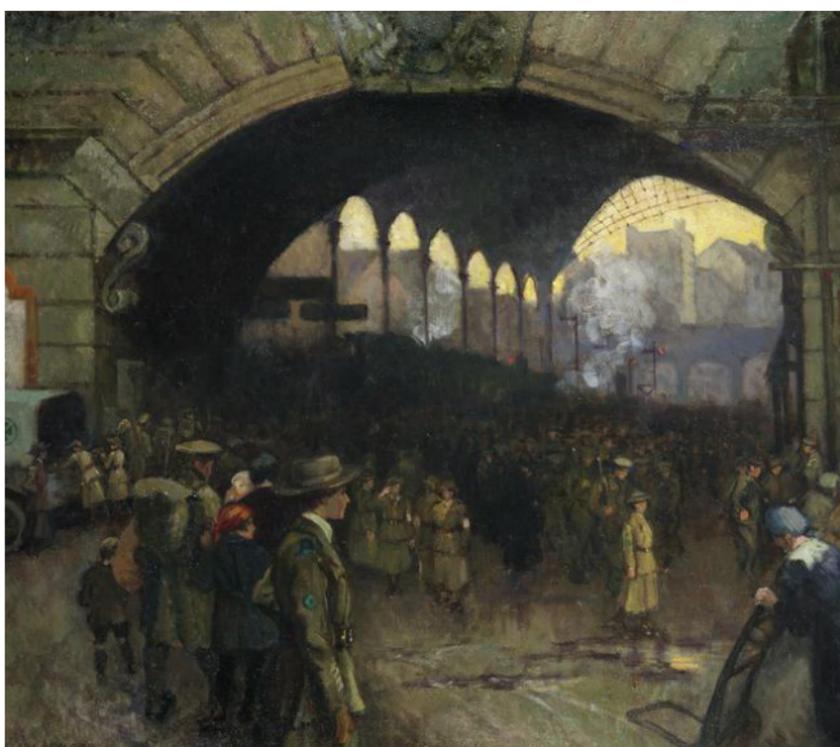
WOMAN ON THE HOME FRONT OPERATING TRAIN SIGNALS, C.1914 – LSE Library

WOMEN ON ALL FRONTS

Suffragist women were active on the Western and Eastern Fronts in a huge variety of roles, including doctors, nurses, drivers, mechanics and administrators.

In 1914 when Scottish suffragist Dr Elsie Inglis approached the War Office to offer her services to the British Army she was told to 'Go home and sit still'. Instead she founded the Scottish Women's Hospitals (SWH). Funded by the Scottish Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies, by 1917 the SWH had branches on the Western and Eastern Fronts. Vera 'Jack' Holme, who had been Emmeline Pankhurst's chauffeur, joined the SWH in 1914 as an ambulance driver, and was later awarded the Samaritan Cross by the King of Serbia in recognition of her service.

The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was established in 1916, followed by the Women's Royal Naval Service in 1917, and the Women's Royal Air Force a year later. When the services were disbanded after the war, over 100,000 women had served.



VICTORIA STATION, 1918: THE GREEN CROSS CORPS (WOMEN'S RESERVE AMBULANCE) GUIDING SOLDIERS ON LEAVE

Oil on canvas by Clare Atwood, 1919. IWM, Art.IWM ART 2513

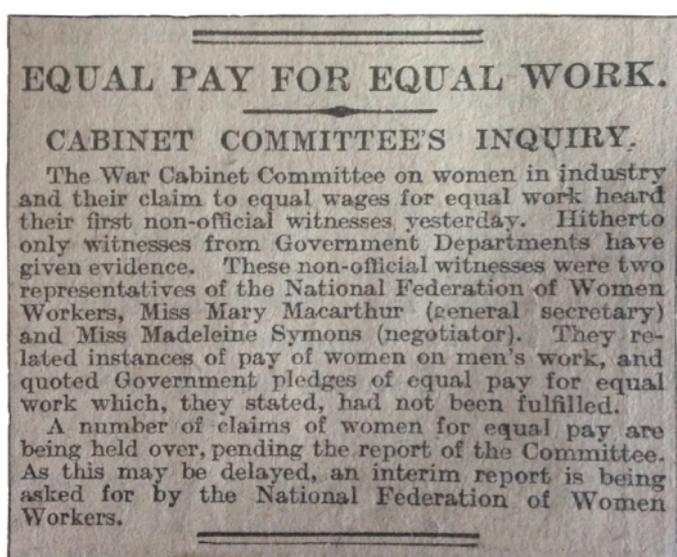
THE HOME FRONT

'The long years of struggle for the Enfranchisement of Women... had done much to educate women ... had shown them new possibilities in themselves, and had inspired them with confidence in each other' **Dr Flora Murray, 1919**

The Endell Street Military Hospital in Covent Garden was opened in 1915 by Dr Flora Murray and Dr Louise Garrett Anderson, and was the first to be staffed entirely by women. It proudly adopted the WSPU motto 'Deeds Not Words'.

Suffragist women were involved in fundraising to help injured service personnel at home and abroad. Patriotic appeals were made invoking the name of women such as British nurse Edith Cavell, who had been executed in 1915 for helping Allied soldiers escape occupied Belgium.

Over a million additional women entered into paid employment over the course of the war. Women workers in a number of different industries, including transport, munitions, and manufacturing were encouraged by suffrage campaigners to agitate for equal pay for equal work, as well as for better and safer working conditions.



**CLIPPING FROM THE TIMES,
5TH OCTOBER 1918**

House of Lords Library

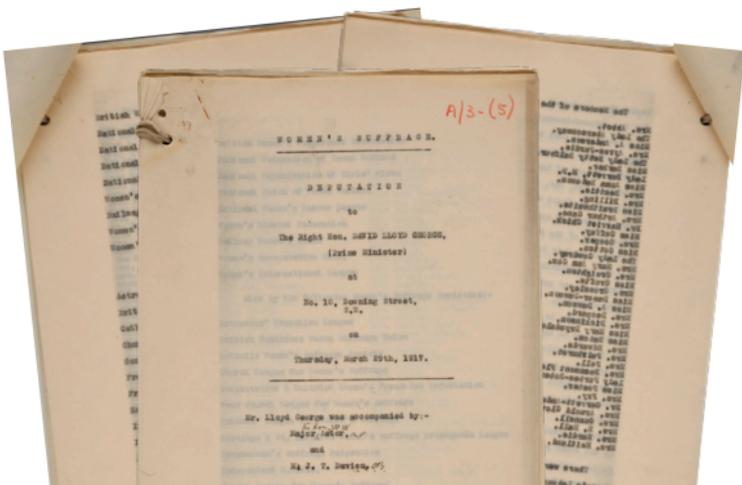
BEHIND THE SCENES

'We should greatly prefer an imperfect scheme that can pass, to the most perfect scheme in the world that could not pass' **Millicent Garrett Fawcett**

By 1916 it was clear that the next general election could not use the pre-war electoral register, as many men on military service had been out of the country too long to meet the residency qualifications. Politicians on all sides also felt that previously unfranchised men who had contributed to the war effort deserved the vote.

A cross-party conference of 32 MPs and Peers was formed to discuss electoral reform, and women's suffrage campaigners saw their opportunity. Concerned about enfranchising too many women, in January 1917 the conference recommended that an age limit of 30 or 35 for potential female voters.

Over 80 women representing 33 suffrage societies and women's organisations took part in a deputation to the Prime Minister. Lloyd George considered the proposed age bar for women voters 'illogical' and 'unjustifiable'. However he advised the deputation not to challenge it, warning that if calls were made for votes for women on the same terms as men there was likely to be strong opposition from anti-suffragist MPs.



WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE DEPUTATION TO LLOYD GEORGE, 1917

Parliamentary Archives, LG/F/229/3

THE VOTE FOR SOME

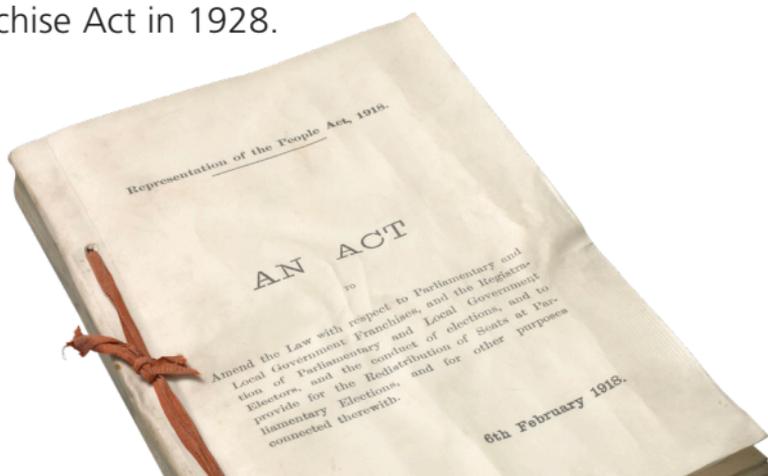
The passing of the Representation of the People Act in 1918 tripled the electorate from 7.7 million (28% of the adult population in 1910) to 21.4 million (78% of the adult population in 1919).

- Virtually all men over the age of 21 got the right to vote
- Military and naval service personnel got the vote at the age of 19
- Women over 30 who met property qualifications got the vote, becoming 43% of the electorate

The Parliament (Qualification of Women) Bill was passed in November 1918. Although women could not vote until they were 30, they could now stand as parliamentary candidates if they were over 21. Although they only had a few weeks to prepare, seventeen women, including Christabel Pankhurst, stood in the 1918 General Election but the only one to be elected, Constance Markievicz, was a member of Sinn Fein and therefore did not take her seat.

The first female MP to take her seat was Nancy Astor, who was elected at a Plymouth by-election in November 1919.

Suffrage societies continued to campaign for women to have the vote on the same terms as men. This finally happened with the passing of the Equal Franchise Act in 1928.



REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT 1918

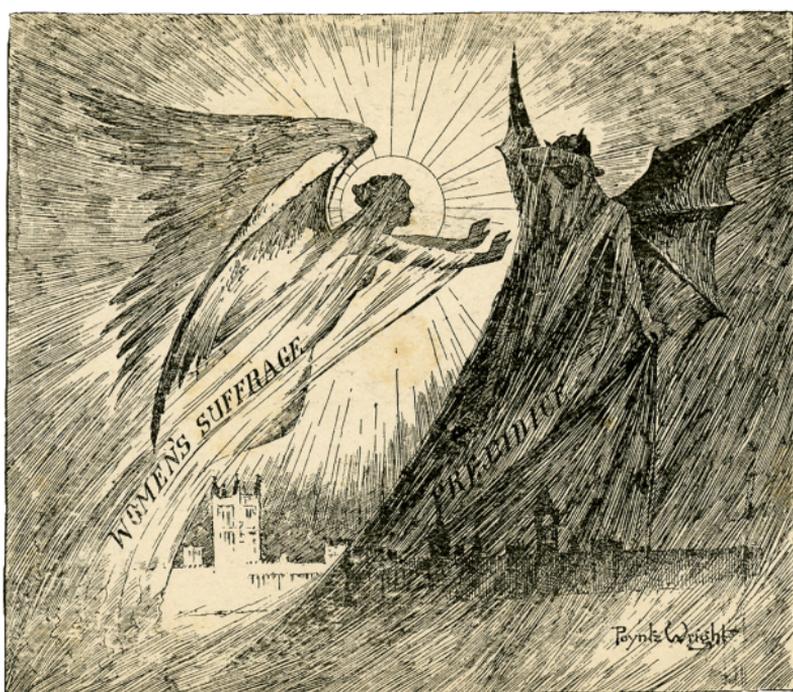
Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/PU/1/1918/7&8G5c64

DID THE WAR MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

When some women got the vote in 1918 after over half a century of campaigning, was it really the war that had finally swung the balance in their favour?

Suffrage societies did not stop campaigning during the war. Political activism underpinned their activities, and their existing networks were used to found new initiatives that helped and supported those in need at home and abroad. Many of these projects were not supported by the Government, and the idea that some women were enfranchised as a reward for their services in wartime is not persuasive, especially as much of the work undertaken was by women too young or too poor to benefit from the new legislation.

The war did make women's work and labour more visible and valuable. Those given the opportunity to enter new professions and learn new skills also gained confidence in themselves, their economic value and their political agency.



ANGEL OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE PUSHING BACK THE DEMON OF PREJUDICE BY POYNTZ WRIGHT, C. 1912

Curator's Office Reference Collection

A change of Prime Minister had significantly boosted their chances and by 1918, after the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference and the urgent need for electoral reform, both Houses were more receptive to the idea of women voters.

In 2018 the centenary of the partial franchise gives us an opportunity to reflect on the whole campaign for votes for women, and the challenges to equality that still remain.



'THIS IS THE HOUSE THAT MAN BUILT', C.1910, POSTCARD SHOWING A FEMALE AND MALE MP. THE SENDER HAS WRITTEN "WILL WE EVER LIVE TO SEE THIS"





**INTRODUCTION OF LADY ASTOR
AS THE FIRST WOMAN MP**

Oil on canvas by Charles Sims, Plymouth City Council
(Museums Galleries Archives)