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1910

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# How the Vote Was Won

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2010

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Art,  
Theatre  
&  
Women's  
Suffrage

May 1<sup>st</sup>  
- Sep 4<sup>th</sup>

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In 1910 there was  
an election for  
men by men.

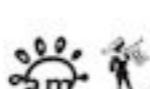
In 2010 we  
celebrate the  
struggle of  
women for the  
right to vote.

We explore  
how writers,  
actresses, artists  
and local people  
all contributed to  
the campaign.

Exhibition curated  
by Irene Cockroft  
& Susan Croft

Project produced by  
Aurora Metro Arts & Media  
in association with the  
Museum of Richmond.

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LOTTERY FUNDED



# Performing Women's Suffrage

**S**pectacle was central to the campaign for women's suffrage in both its law-abiding and militant branches. It was the first large-scale movement to use the resources of photography, newspapers and early newsreels to publicise the Suffrage Cause.

For the militants, the image of the woman chained to the railings or carried off by the police was designed to shock audiences of readers and viewers and galvanise their support.



Emmeline Pankhurst is escorted at a protest outside Buckingham Palace. Her tactics for drawing attention to the suffrage cause led her to prison several times. Image courtesy of the New York Times Library.

Both the law-abiding suffragists and the militant suffragettes staged regular large-scale demonstrations between 1907 and 1913. Women taking to the streets broke the taboos that still confined them to home, displayed the sheer numbers supporting the Cause and contradicted popular anti-suffrage imagery that represented them as harridans and shrews.

Suffrage demonstrations were carefully choreographed events, reflecting the contemporary popularity of pageants and drawing on the organisational and artistic expertise of skilled theatre professionals, such as Edith Craig and Sime Seruya, to create demonstrations with maximum public impact.

Women were often dressed in white, with purple, white and green sashes. They marched under embroidered banners, with drum and fife bands, in groups from all over the country.



Indian suffragists taking part in the Women's Liberation Procession in June 1911. Image courtesy of the House of Commons.

Highly qualified female teachers and doctors drew attention to the fact that despite their professional achievements and their status as tax-paying citizens, they were still denied the vote.



The formal procession of Emily Wilding Kenton, transported beneath the horses of the King's Horse at the Derby, to give a huge public event. Image courtesy of the New York Times Library.

## Tactics

**I**n 1909 the militant suffragettes stepped up their campaign against Liberal Government inaction by breaking windows of government buildings.

By 1913 this had escalated to destroying mail in letterboxes and arson attacks on unoccupied buildings. All targets were chosen to avoid endangering life.



New Scotland Yard after it was burnt down. Image courtesy of the New York Times Library.

Arrested and imprisoned as common criminals, campaigners demanded to be treated as political prisoners. When this was ignored they retaliated with hunger strikes.

In 1909 the Home Secretary brought in forcible feeding. Prisoners were held down by warders, whilst a tube was passed down throat or nose to administer liquid food.

By 1913 the public outcry against this form of torture was so great that the government changed tactics. It introduced what became known as the Cat and Mouse Act.

Emaciated hunger-strikers were released in order to avoid their dying in custody. When strength returned they were re-arrested with no remission of sentence.

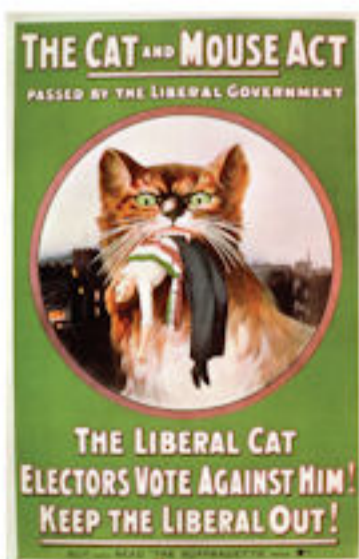


Image courtesy of the House of Commons.

# Key Players

In the early years of suffrage campaigning, many women paid allegiance to more than one suffrage society, believing a variety of approaches was necessary. Camps polarised as the WSPU, which began by injecting new vigour into the campaign, became more autocratic, militant and seemingly counter-productive in its activities.



Image courtesy of The National Library, London Metropolitan University

## National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies

The largest suffrage society was the 'constitutional' or law-abiding NUWSS. The NUWSS was formed from several older societies drawn together in 1897.

Radical by definition, the NUWSS was statesman-like in its approach to suffrage campaigning, relying on reasoned argument to bring about votes for women. The union was led by Mrs (later Dame) **Millicent Fawcett** (1847-1929).

## Women's Social & Political Union

Angered by the way in which Parliament ignored NUWSS initiatives, **Emmeline Pankhurst** (1858-1928) founded the militant WSPU in 1903. Originally based in Manchester, its battle cries were 'Votes for Women' and 'Deeds not Words'. Along with many of her followers, Mrs Pankhurst was imprisoned and went on hunger strike. She was released and re-arrested numerous times under a "temporary discharge for ill-health" (Cat and Mouse Act) provision.

WSPU members were described as 'suffragettes' by the Daily Mail newspaper to distinguish them in print from law-abiding 'suffragists'.



Image courtesy of The National Library, London Metropolitan University

## Women's Freedom League

From 1907 Mrs **Charlotte Despard** (1844-1939) led the breakaway WFL, founded after a group split from the WSPU. Its banner exhorted 'Dare to be Free'. The WFL approach to campaign planning was democratic. Not averse to civil disobedience, Mrs Despard followed the principle of 'passive resistance' advocated by Gandhi in India, rather than incite violent law-breaking.

WFL members joined sub-groups like the Tax Resistance League and the 1911 census boycott.



Image courtesy of The National Library, London Metropolitan University

## National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage

In 1910 the NLOWS was formed by amalgamating two smaller 'anti' groups. Its figure-head was author of popular novels **Mrs Humphry Ward** (1851-1920). At first a cause for dismay among suffragists, opposition proved a blessing in disguise. It exposed the feebleness of the argument against women's suffrage.



Portrait Mrs Humphry Ward by John Russell Gray 1895  
Image courtesy of National Library, London

# Playwriting for the Vote

## Inez Bensusan (1871-1967)



Image courtesy of the British Library

She was born in Australia where women gained the vote in 1902. In Britain, she soon became actively involved in running the AFL Play Department. In her own moving play

*The Apple*, the daughters are neglected in favour of the son, the apple of the father's eye.

Inez Bensusan went on to set up the Women's Theatre season at the Coronet Theatre in 1913. With the outbreak of war, she switched her energies into war work, a means of proving women's equal citizenship. The Women's Theatre

performed extensively for troops in France and Inez then worked with the British Rhine Army Dramatic Company.

In later years, Inez Bensusan settled in Chiswick, co-founding the House of Arts to encourage theatre, art and music locally.

Some of her playbills are on display elsewhere in the exhibition.



Bensusan with the British Rhine Army Dramatic Company for whom she wrote, directed and performed (1918). Image courtesy of London Library.

## Cicely Hamilton (1862-1952)



Image courtesy of the British Library

She was one of the most prolific and successful of the suffrage playwrights. She jointly wrote *How the Vote Was Won* with Christopher St John. It was staged by suffrage groups all over Britain and in the USA.

The play was also staged in Twickenham Town Hall in 1910 and is celebrated with a reading at the Orange Tree Theatre in June, 2010.

Cicely also spoke at rallies and published widely on suffrage topics. Like her novel *Marriage as Trade*, her play *Diana of Dobson's*, staged in 1908, dealt with the economic options open to women.



*Diana of Dobson's* produced at the Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond in 2007. Photo: Robert Jay

## Elizabeth Robins (1862-1952)



Photo courtesy of the British Library

Born in Kentucky, USA she moved to London in 1889 and soon established a reputation as a major actress, best-known for performing in and producing Ibsen's plays.

She published the first of her 15 novels in 1892 and co-wrote the controversial play on infanticide, *Alan's Wife*, with Florence Bell (produced anonymously).

Her play *Votes for Women* appeared at the Royal Court in 1907 and in novel form as *The Convert*.

She became the first President of the Women Writers' Suffrage League and later published her writings and speeches on the suffrage movement in *Way Stations*.



*Votes for Women* was recently published by James Wren to celebrate the centenary of the AFL. It includes plays by Elizabeth Robins, Cicely Hamilton, Inez Bensusan and others.

# Art for Votes' Sake

**W**hen the late 19th century census returns confirmed over a million surplus women with no men to support them, the government opened schools of art to women.

Sylvia Pankhurst, Ernestine Mills and Olive Hockin were among thousands who grasped the opportunity to learn and earn. Art became a valuable tool in campaigning for the vote.

## Ernestine Mills (1871-1959)



Ernestine Mills assembling her Kensington studio. Image courtesy of © Peter Goodwin 2011

Tina studied fine art at the Slade School of Art and enamel-on-metal skills at Finsbury Technical College. Combined art and craft skills enabled her to create jewellery in suffrage campaign colours.

Mills exhibited at the Society of Women Artists of which she was treasurer.



The Red Insect: based on the danger of the drug to women for her sisters the previous part of suffrage. Created by Ernestine Mills c. 1910. Image courtesy of © Peter Goodwin 2011

## Olive Hockin (1881-1936)

A Theosophist, Olive studied at the Slade. Her work was exhibited at the Royal Academy and the Walker Gallery. When police raided her Notting Hill studio they described it as 'a suffragette arsenal'.

Olive was imprisoned in 1913 for her suspected part in an arson attack on Roehampton Golf Club and for involvement in causing damage to the Orchid House at Kew Gardens.



O.L. Hockin's painting 'The Red Insect' was featured by Olive Hockin in 1910. Olive Hockin on the right of suffragette emblematic banners for her cause at a political gathering, November 1913. Image courtesy of the artist and her estate. Photo: Peter Goodwin

## Edith Hinchley



Portrait of Ernestine Mills in blue painting, which by Edith Hinchley. Image courtesy of © Peter Goodwin 2011

Portrait miniaturist Edith wrote in *The Vote* magazine of 12 August 1911, 'The swift response of the woman artist to the Women's Movement is no mystery. The difficulties placed in women's professional path make them feminists. Equal citizenship is a starting point to redressing the degradation of inferior status.'

## Mary Lowndes (1857-1929)

Stained glass artist Mary Lowndes was chair of the **Artists' Suffrage League**. Members were professional artists prepared to contribute time and talent to the Cause. Mary designed most of the banners.



SHORTHAND WRITERS banner. Image courtesy of the Women's Social and Political Union. Photo: Peter Goodwin

## Emily Ford (1850 - 1930)

From a Leeds-based family of writers, artists and suffragists, Artists' Suffrage League vice-chairman Emily Ford designed banners and posters. Her Chelsea Studio was a haven for political activists.

## Pamela Colman Smith (1878-1951)

'Pixie' Colman Smith was the daughter of an American father and a Jamaican mother. She was an artist, theatre designer and close friend of Ellen Terry. Pixie designed for Edith Craig and Chris St John's Pioneer Players and was responsible for memorable suffrage spectacle.

Colman Smith contributed to the lampoon *Anti-Suffrage Alphabet* compiled by Laurence Housman and to poster designs for the Suffrage Atelier. The tarot cards Pixie designed, known as the Rider-Waite deck, have become the world's best-selling pack.

Suffrage Atelier, WSPU, c. 1910. Image courtesy of the National Archives

At the Atelier, professional artists trained amateurs to produce simple but effective political propaganda, mainly for the WSPU.



# Acting Up!

## The Actresses Franchise League

or AFL was formed in December 1908 when an inaugural meeting was held at the Criterion Restaurant in Piccadilly. Well-known actresses like Ellen Terry, Madge Kendal and Lena Ashwell, along with hundreds of rank and file performers, pledged their support to the cause of women's suffrage.

**'This meeting of actresses calls upon the Government immediately to extend the franchise to women: that all women claim the franchise as a necessary protection for workers under modern industrial conditions, and maintain that by their labour they have earned the right to this defence.'**

GERTRUDE ELLIOTT

Over the next six years, in collaboration with the Women Writers' Suffrage League, the AFL was responsible for writing and staging suffrage



plays at numerous events from meetings in East End Girls' Clubs to suffrage bazaars. But their activities also included training fellow suffragists in public speaking, hosting debates, opening fundraising galas and even using their make-up skills to help disguise suffragettes on the run from the police.

The first edition of the hugely popular play *How the Vote was Won* was written by Lady Hamilton and Mrs. T. Jones. In it women, dressed as men, go on strike and are to be supported by their women-made income until the household men get up in arms and march in support of women's suffrage. It was staged at Swanborough Town Hall in 1915. Image courtesy of the Women's Library, London Metropolitan University.

## Dame Ellen Terry (1847-1928)

Ellen Terry was a founder member of the AFL, lending the authority of her name and standing to highlight the absurdity of women's disenfranchisement. In 1909, she played Restoration actress Nance Oldfield in the original production of *A Pageant of Great Women*:

**'By your leave, Nance Oldfield does her talking for herself!  
If you, Sir Prejudice had had your way,  
There would be never an actress on the boards...  
The stage would be as dull as now  
'tis merry -  
No Oldfield, Woffington - or Ellen Terry!'**



Ellen Terry's home at Smallhythe in Kent, now owned by The National Trust. Photo: iStock.com



Ellen Terry as thought in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Image courtesy of the Women's Library, London Metropolitan University.

## Edith Craig (1869-1947)

Edith Craig was the daughter of Ellen Terry and sister of Edward Gordon Craig. She was a designer and director, responsible for staging numerous productions of *How the Vote was Won* and *A Pageant of Great Women* around the country.

She and her partner Christopher St John (Christabel Marshall) went on to set up the Pioneer Players, staging an innovative repertoire of plays by women and European classics into the 1920s.

Their home at Smallhythe became a safe-house for suffragettes on the run from the police.



Edith Craig. Image courtesy of the Women's Library, London Metropolitan University.



Part of the 1911 costumes of the Women's Pantomime in June 1911. Image courtesy of the Women's Library.

# Local Suffrage Activity

## Princess Sophia Duleep Singh (1876-1948)



Princess Sophia Duleep Singh holding the suffrage banner at Hampton Court Palace, where she had a suite of apartments.

The daughter of a Maharajah exiled from the Punjab, she lived in a grace and favour apartment at Faraday House, Hampton Court which was provided by her godmother, Queen Victoria.

Sophia became a committed member of the Tax Resistance League set up in 1909. Taken to court for non-payment of tax, she declared: "If I am not a fit

person for the purposes of representation, why should I be a fit person for taxation?" When bailiffs seized jewellery to cover the debt, suffrage supporters bought it back at auction, using the event to gain publicity for the cause.



Princess Catherine, Bertha & Sophia Duleep Singh, at their presentation at court, c.1905.

Princess Sophia Duleep Singh

Many suffrage supporters also boycotted the census of 1911, spoiling their census returns with statements like: "No persons here, only women".

Punch Magazine quipped that the ladies 'must have taken leave of their census'.

## Kitty Marion (1871-1944)

Kitty was born in Germany but moved to Britain where she worked as a music hall artiste and actress. She joined the WSPU and was arrested many times, first for throwing stones then for her involvement in the WSPU arson campaign.

In June 1913, she and Clara Given were arrested in Richmond, having burnt down the Grandstand at Hurst Park racecourse, West Molesey. Sentenced to three years' penal servitude for this and three other fires, she went on hunger strike. Over her suffrage career she served seven prison terms, undergoing nearly 200 force-feedings.



Kitty Marion on her release from prison, being carried by the Women's Social and Political Union.

## Lilian Lenton (1891-1972)

Lilian was a dancer who joined the WSPU at the age of 21 after listening to a speech by Emmeline Pankhurst. She began by smashing windows and was arrested in February 1913 on suspicion of setting fire to the Tea-House, Kew Gardens.



Home Office surveillance picture of Lilian Lenton, being carried by the Women's Social and Political Union.

Forcibly fed in Holloway, she became ill with pleurisy caused by food entering her lungs. The political embarrassment of her case caused the Government to pass the notorious Cat and Mouse Act.

Lilian was awarded a Red Cross medal for her work as a nurse in World War 1. She later came to live in Twickenham.

## Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)



Home Office photograph of Bertrand Russell, 1914.

In 1907, the philosopher and Richmond resident Bertrand Russell unsuccessfully stood for election on a Women's Suffrage platform at the Wimbledon Parliamentary by-election. His wife contributed an entry to the *Suffrage Cook Book* on how to preserve a good suffrage speaker. He remained an outspoken social critic, and was the founding President of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958.

## The Lady Frances Balfour (1858-1931)

Born into the aristocracy, she grew up helping her parents with their many campaigns for social reform. Frances married architect Eustace Balfour. She tried to persuade his brother, Conservative Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, to support the cause of women's suffrage with limited public success.

Lady Frances became President of the London Society for Women's Suffrage and of its branch in Richmond. Blessed with an excellent platform voice, she attended events and rallies throughout the borough.



Leaders of the Suffrage Society Movement in the WSPU. Left to right: Lady Frances Balfour, Millicent Fawcett, Ethel Snowden, Emily Davies and Dr Sophia Bryant. Members of the Women's Social and Political Union.

# Contemporary Responses

The suffrage movement continues to inspire artists, writers, theatre and film-makers.

## Stage and Screen

In the post-war period, dramatisations of the suffrage struggle have included Midge Mackenzie's legendary BBC television series *Shoulder to Shoulder* in 1974. The Actresses Franchise League provided an inspiration to a new wave of feminist theatre companies in the 1970s.



Sam Phillips as Emmeline Pankhurst in *Shoulder to Shoulder*, from a series of 10 TV plays.

Sidewalk Theatre Company was the first to revive AFL plays like *How the Vote was Won* by Cicely Hamilton and Chris St John, while Mrs Worthington's Daughters re-staged works including Margaret Wynne Nevinson's *In the Workhouse* and J.M. Barrie's *The Twelve Pound Look*.



*In the Workhouse*, from a series of 10 plays.

More recently contemporary playwrights have created new works in response to the suffrage theme.

In 2003, New Strides Theatre Company's *Tea with Mrs Pankhurst*, co-written by Ruth Urquhart and James Duncan, explored the conflict within the suffrage movement.

Helen Paris and Leslie Hill created a performance art piece inspired by the suffragettes, as part of 'Shooting Live Artists', now available on YouTube.

In 2008 Rebecca Lenkiewicz's *Her Naked Skin*, produced by the National Theatre, dealt with the suffragettes and their imprisonment in Holloway, and explored this country's shameful history by showing on stage the cruelty of the government's forcible feeding programme.



*Her Naked Skin*, from a series of 10 plays.

The play also made theatre history by being the first play by a living woman writer to be staged in the largest of the National Theatre's auditoria, namely the Olivier Theatre.

## Art

The 1866 women's suffrage petition inspired textile artist Ann Dingsdale in 2001 to create a memorial wall hanging. Its fugitive colours and cobweb texture symbolise our fragmentary

and fragile knowledge of the courageous women who first signed for suffrage. They laid the cornerstone of modern society.



Ann Dingsdale creates her unique textiles from a fabric made of paper material.

## Politics

In politics too, the commitment and tactics of the suffragettes remain an inspiration.

In 2009, protesters from the activist group Climate Rush super-glued themselves to a statue in Parliament Hall where 100 years earlier suffragette Marjory Hume had chained herself. They borrow their motto 'Deeds Not Words' and their style from their campaigning forebears.



Photography by Helen Dingsdale



Groups like Womankind Worldwide continue to fight around the world for women's rights, for the vote, still denied to women in a small number of countries, but also for women's education and empowerment, for more women in government and against discrimination and the sexual abuse of women and girls: [www.womankind.org.uk](http://www.womankind.org.uk)

In Britain today, women's pay is only around 80% of that of men. In many industries women still face a glass ceiling preventing them from achieving their full potential. There are few women Ministers in the Cabinet.

Women have made huge progress in Britain since they were first granted equal voting rights in 1928, but there is still a long way to go before women achieve real equality.

For more information and resources go to [www.suffragette.org.uk](http://www.suffragette.org.uk)