



The extension of suffrage

A virtual museum by
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Welcome to my Suffrage Museum

Here you will find out all about the extension of suffrage in Britain. From the first rally to the later campaigners, suffragette newspapers to the Representation of the People act, you will leave this museum knowing lots about the extension of the franchise. It will tell the story of the 100-year long campaign for all adults to be able to vote. Interestingly, women earn this right long after men do, as you will discover. It all started at St Peter's Fields, Manchester, at what was later known as the Peterloo Massacre...



The Peterloo Massacre

A depiction of the scenes witnessed at St Peter's Fields



16 August 1819. 60,000 protesters, mainly from the cotton industry, congregated on St Peter's Fields to campaign for political reform. The Peterloo Massacre got its name when the press likened it to the Battle of Waterloo that had happened just years before, and because of the bloody attack that followed. It was originally planned to be a peaceful gathering, for people to listen to political speakers such as Henry Hunt, and to meet like-minded citizens who were also passionate about getting the vote. Some magistrates watching from a nearby window, however, didn't agree with this and thought it would turn into a riot and destroy the town. In fear, they called in the Yeomanry, who split up the crowds and arrested Hunt. They slashed their swords and charged their horses, and all in all, 15 people were killed, with over 600 injured. Instead of making a change, the government clamped down on laws and introduced the Six Acts, which prevented anything like this happening again. However, Peterloo marked the beginning of a nationwide campaign for universal suffrage.

The Chartists - William Cuffay



The Chartists were a group of workers who believed that the Great Reform Act (1832) was not enough and that workers needed the vote too. Born in 1788, William Cuffay was a key figure in this movement and by 1848 he had been elected as a leader. He was involved in planning the 1848 rally on Kennington Common, which attracted at least 20,000 participants, but it had to be abandoned. Allegedly, he was in the process of planning a more violent protest when he was arrested and sentenced to Tasmania. In 1856, Cuffay was released, however he chose to stay in Tasmania. His wife joined him and they continued to campaign for political rights for working people.

Extending Men's Suffrage



In the late 1800s, three reforms were passed which enabled all men to vote. They were:

1867: Most working men in towns were given the vote. They had to be skilled workers and own their own house. This doubled the number of voters to 2 million.

1872: the Ballot Act made voting secret. This was important as it prevented people from being pressured to vote for a particular candidate, for example by the promise of a reward, or the threat of a consequence such as losing their job if they did not vote as their employer wanted them too.

1884: Most working men over 21, in the countryside as well as the towns, were granted the vote. Two-thirds of men could now vote, tripling the number of voters to 6 million.

Harriet Taylor Mill



Harriet Taylor Mill, along with her husband John, were two pioneering protesters during the early stages of the women's suffrage movement. In 1851, in the Westminster Review, Harriet wrote an anonymous essay in which she argued that women who paid taxes should be represented. Her husband, John Stuart Mill, was impressed by this and wrote his own pamphlet in 1869, echoing her ideas. In 1866, a new Reform Bill extending the vote to more men was debated. Mill worked with the Langham Place Group to put together a petition asking for women's suffrage to be added to the bill. When Mill presented his petition during the debate, however, it was met with laughter from the male MPs. In 1868, Mill tried again, this time with a larger petition containing more signatures, including Florence Nightingale's, and, though it wasn't laughed at this time, it still had little effect. However, Harriet and John played a key role in beginning this campaign for women's votes.

The WSPU Suffragettes

Two campaigners



WSPU stands for Women's Social Political Union, an organisation set up by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter, Christabel and Sylvia. The suffragettes' approach was not peaceful as other peaceful protests hadn't made a change. Deeds not words was their slogan, and some of their tactics included smashing windows, planting bombs, setting fire to buildings and postboxes and holding rallies and marches. They were the group that eventually pushed the government to give women the vote and their ideas were radically shocking. The suffragettes of this movement were the first protesters to go on hunger strike, which led to force-feeding and the barbaric Cat and Mouse Act. A few significant figures of the union were Emily Davison, Mary Richardson, Annie Kenney and of course the Pankhursts.

And finally, the outbreak of WW1

To end my museum, I will tell you how the First World War had such an impact on the women's suffrage movement. When the war broke out, Emmeline Pankhurst suspended all their votes for women campaigns in order to help the war effort. The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and Women's Hospital Corps were formed and women took on male jobs, freeing up the men so they could serve on the front line. This showed that women were just as capable at doing the job as men, and was one of the main factors that led to the passing of the Representation of the People Act, in 1918. This law enabled all women over 30 to vote. The NUWSS continued to campaign until 1928, when the Equal Franchise Act lowered the female voting age to 21, the same as men. I hope you enjoyed my museum and now know lots more about the extension of the franchise in Britain!

