

THE EXTENSION OF SUFFRAGE

A virtual museum by
Jessica Mitchell

This power point is about how the people of Britain campaigned for their right to vote.

The Peterloo Massacre

On the 16th of August 1918, around 60,000 men women and children (most cotton factory workers) gathered on an open space in Manchester known as St Peters fields carrying homemade flags and banners showing support for the extension of the franchise. Lead by many leading roles in the campaign, especially Henry 'Orator' Hunt. Hunt demanded that all men and all women should be given the right to vote.

What was meant to be a peaceful meeting, quickly turned into a bloody massacre. Many of the wealthier inhabitants, feared that the gathering could become a rebellion. Manchester's magistrates were supporters of Lord Liverpool's Tory government, and therefore strongly disagreed with the idea of democracy. They requested the help of the Manchester Yeomanry Cavalry and the 15th Regiment of Dragoons in order to break up the meeting and arrest Hunt. The yeomanry attacked the crowd causing injury and confusion. In all, 18 people were killed and around 650 injured. Hunt was arrested and jailed for 2 years along with many of the other leading roles.

Although a lot of the outcome of the massacre was negative, some good came out of it. The blood shed of the event caught the attention of some of the leading factory owners, and caused them to join the act.



After Peterloo

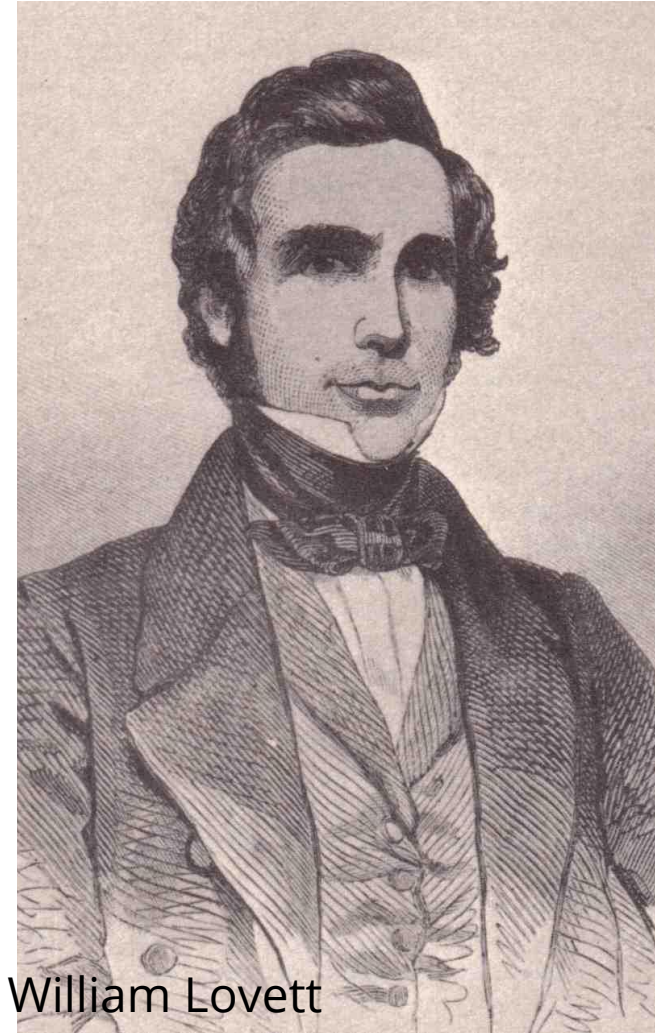
Journalists reported the events of August 1819 and many people were horrified. The deaths at Peterloo had investigations carried out on them, however the soldiers were cleared of any wrong doing. The government quickly introduced new laws to prevent anymore protests taking place. The reaction of the government and actions of the soldiers made further protests very dangerous.

Great reform act 1832

Regardless of the failure in previous demands for reform, new laws were established in 1832, giving the vote to men living in towns that possessed property worth more than £10 per year. This gave more people a voice in politics in Britain, yet it was not enough of a change. The new voting laws still excluded 6 out of 7 adult men in Britain in addition to all women.

The Chartist movement 1837

In spite of the great reform act, only 8% of Britain's population could vote. The vote was still only in the hands of wealthier middle class workers and this angered lots of the lower class workers. In 1837, a group of working men, led by William Lovett, came together to campaign for reform. At first it started peacefully. Signatures were collected for a petition called the Great Charter. Though when the charter was brought to Westminster in 1839, it was laughed at by Parliament. And so a new slogan was brought to the mills and factories. 'Peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must'. In October 1839, there were thousands of workers gathering on the mills, preparing for the revolution was certainly coming. But-strangely-it never did. The last time the Chartists met was on Kennington common in London, 1848. There were apparently more spectators than demonstrators. The thousands of police members prevented their march to parliament from happening, and so they were forced to go home.



William Lovett

The extension of male suffrage

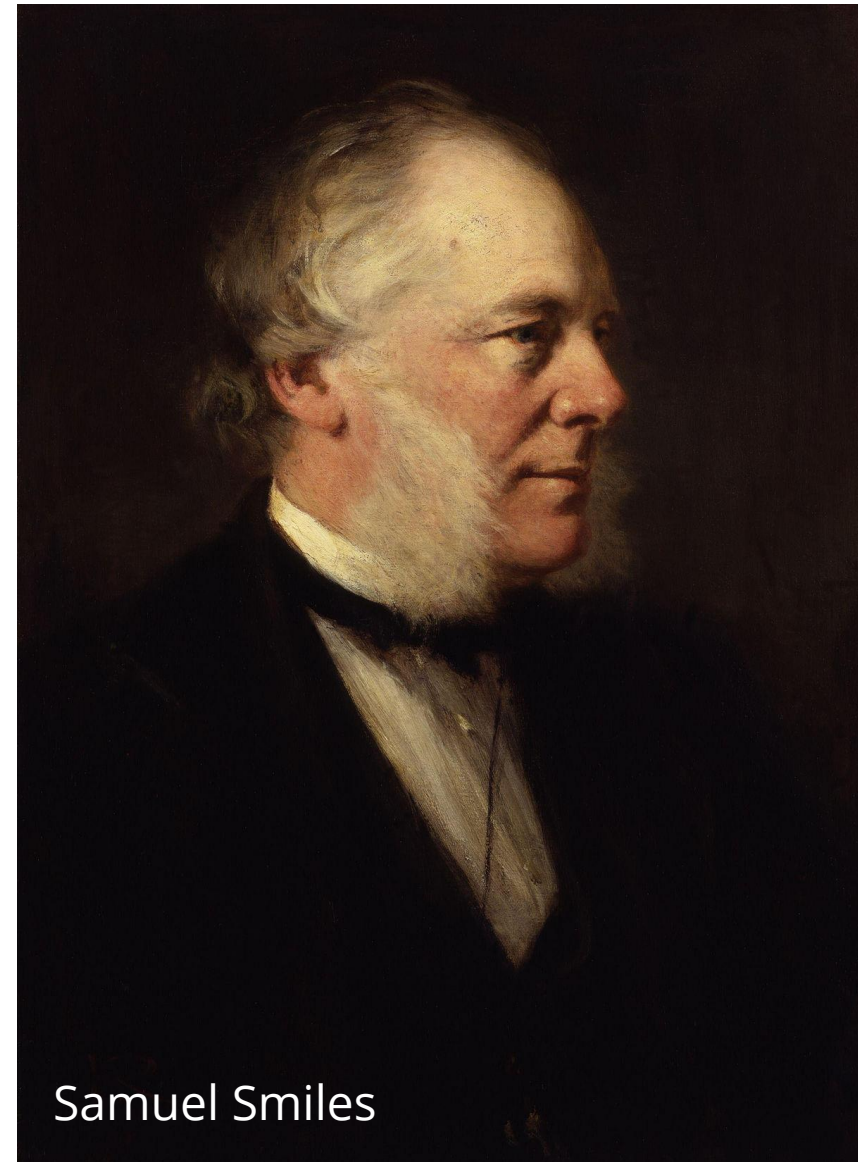
1867- The number of voters was doubled to reach 2 million. If a man was a skilled worker and owned his own house, then he was allowed the vote.

1872- The ballot act made voting secret. This was key as it meant that a man would not be pressured into voting a certain way.

1884- Most working men were allowed the vote. Not only in the towns but also in the countryside. This tripled the number of voters to 6 million.

Timothy Claxton and some friends set up the society of Ingenious Working mechanics which included a library, lectures, and discussion groups for members to strengthen their education. Each branch of the society had the roles of chairman, treasurer, secretary and more meaning that working men could experience responsibility.

Men like Timothy Claxton and Samuel Smiles helped to change the way working men were viewed.



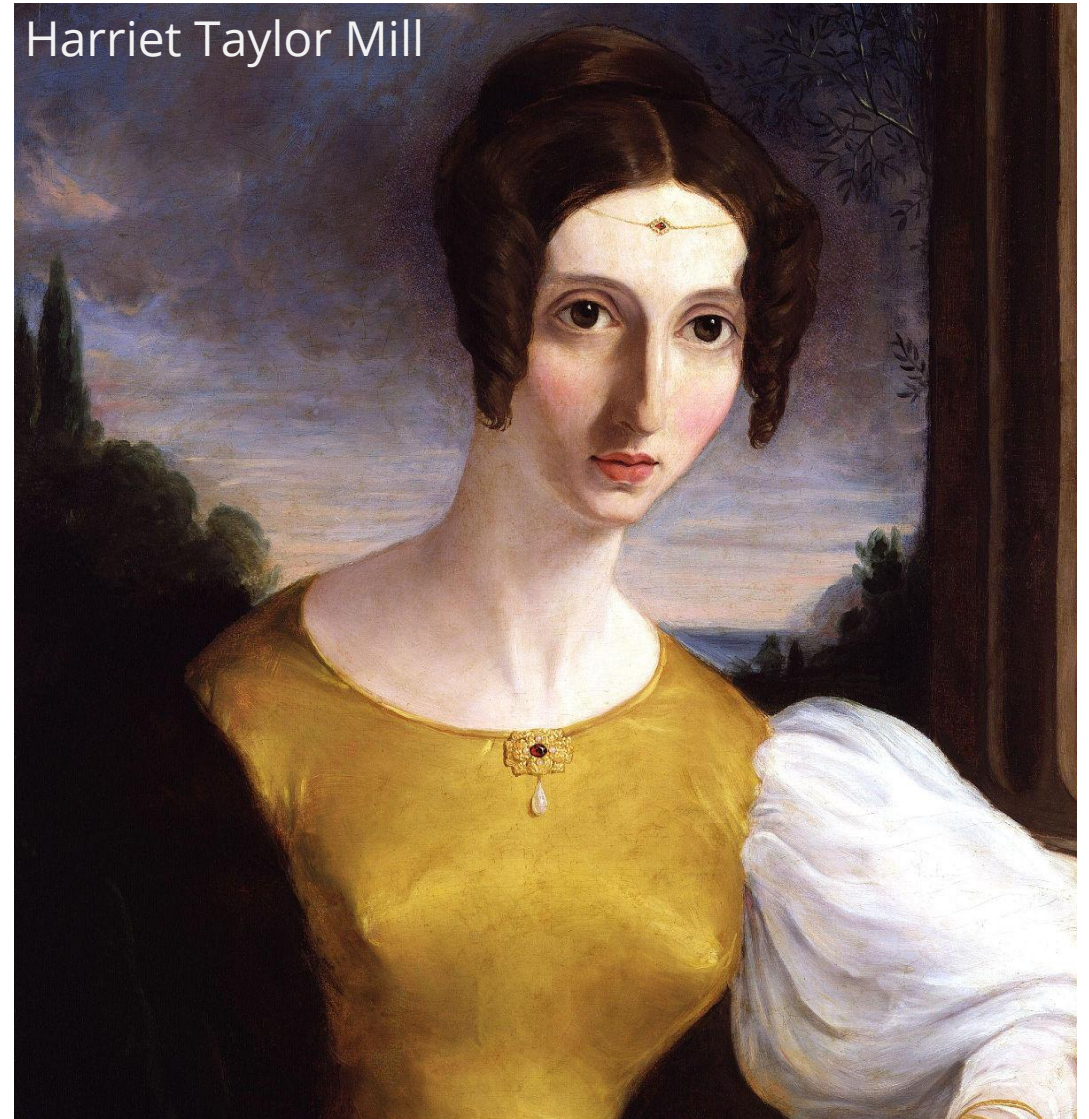
Samuel Smiles

Votes for Women

Women's votes were not the concern at St Peters fields in 1819, although approximately 1 in 8 of the 60,000 people were women. There were also women on the platform with the other speakers. Women's main concern then, was that a member of their household would be allowed to vote, which would have an effect on the main issues at the time, for example, wages and working conditions.

Harriet Taylor Mill and her Husband John Stuart Mill were committed campaigners for women's suffrage. In the Westminster review, in 1851 Harriet composed an anonymous essay named: 'The enfranchisement of women'. She claimed that if a women paid taxes then that women should be represented. She justified that women should be considered equal to men in all areas of life, but this could not happen unless women were allowed the vote. In 1866, John created a petition asking for women's franchise to be added to the latest reform bill that was currently being considered. The petition collected a significant amount of votes in two weeks, yet when presented, the male MPs simply laughed at it, much like when the great charter was presented to parliament in 1837.

Harriet Taylor Mill



The Suffragettes

On the 10th of March, 1914, a young woman named Mary Richardson entered the National Gallery in London. She had been there many times before, however this time she was not there to just admire the art. She had a job to do. She walked up to a painting by the Spanish master Valazquez, and with a meat cleaver in her hand, broke the glass. Before the guards could stop her she'd slashed the painting 7 times. This was the worst act of criminal damage in the history of the National gallery and obviously it brought up the question: 'Why?'. She gave her answer quite simply: "I'm a suffragette."

Click here to find
out more about
the suffragettes



Mary Richardson



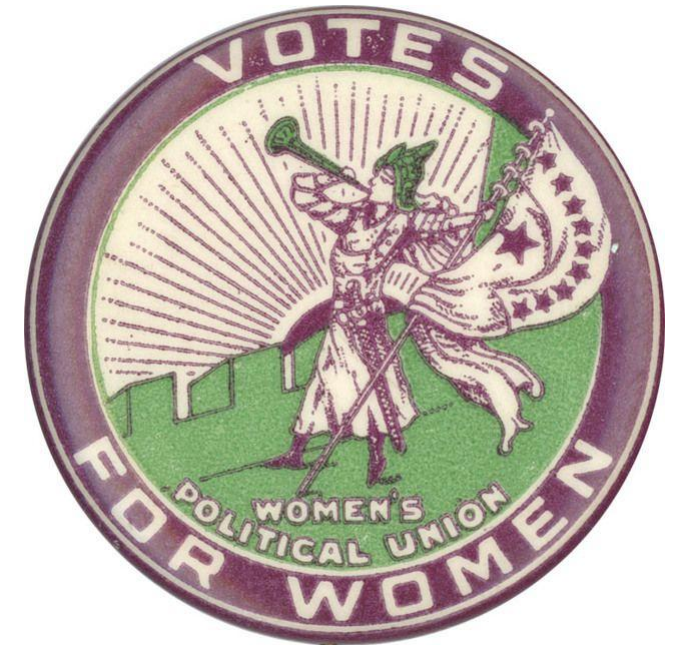
Deeds Not Words

In 1903, The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed by Emmaline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. They were frustrated at the lack of progress made towards woman's suffrage. Women, so far, had only tried to win the vote using peaceful approaches, such as petitions. In 1906, it moved to London, while splitting off from many of the other suffrage organisations in the north of England. They became known as the suffragettes.

The suffragettes' motto was deeds not words as, due to the lack of success from the suffragists using peaceful strategies, their strategy was using illegal acts such as burning down buildings and chaining themselves to railings outside Buckingham palace. Of course, these acts got them sent to prison. But they didn't stop there. Suffragette prisoners started to go on hunger strike, demanding the right to be treated as political prisoners. When Herbert Asquith - the prime minister at the time (who was strongly against votes for women) heard about this, he ordered for the suffragettes to be brutally force fed.

The public were obviously appalled by this point, so Asquith began using the cat and mouse technique. As soon as a suffragette was so weak that they might die, they were sent back home to recover, only to return to prison when recovered. Mary Richardson was one of the many suffragettes, who were transferred in and out of prison multiple times.

Were the suffragettes' tactics effective? Unfortunately not. The problem was that the suffragettes were so extreme, so shocking and so unladylike, that they put people, that might have supported their cause, off.



The first world war

In August 1914, World War 1 broke out, and the suffragettes stopped campaigning. However the Pankhursts and the WSPU worked with the government in order to get women involved.

Women took on jobs that would usually be worked by men so that men could go and fight on the front line.

Women also went to serve as nurses to help those injured on the front line. Others worked in factories creating weapons and resources to be used in the war.

Representation of the people act, 1918

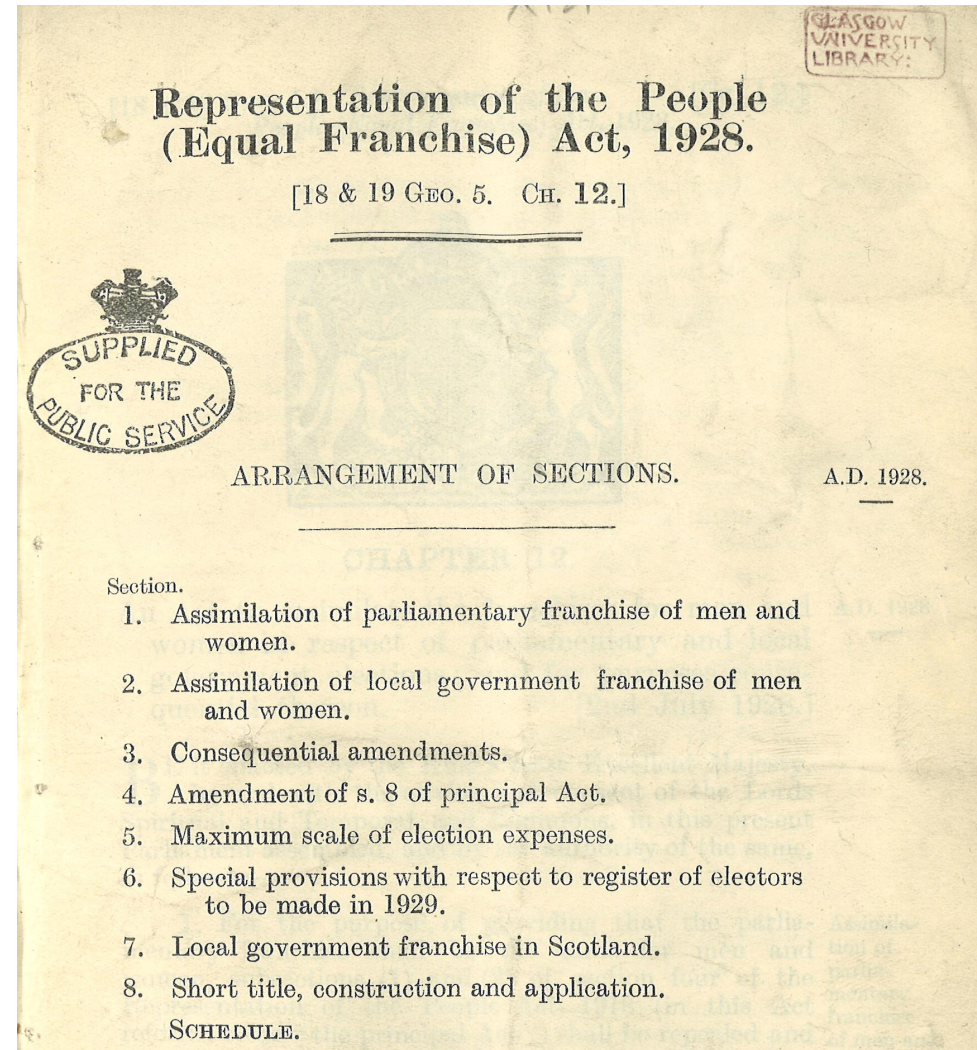
The representation of the people act in 1918 gave women the vote although a property qualification was needed and you had to be over 30 to do so.

The women's service during the war gave MPs a good reason to adapt their previous decisions, though the war was not the only reason for the new laws. Without decades of campaigning, women would have never got the vote.



The equal Franchise act, 1928

In 1928, women got given the same voting rights as men. This meant that all men and all women could now vote as long as they were aged 21 or over. There were no property ownership or wealth restrictions.



Overall, you can see that life today would not be the same for men and women, if all those people had not fought for us to have a say in how we are governed.