

The extension of suffrage

*A virtual museum
By Tabitha Hawkins*

Welcome to the museum - the extension of suffrage

- Historians use the word suffrage to refer to the right to vote and be represented in politics. So, we can speak of the extension of suffrage, meaning the extension or widening of the right to vote to more people.

The Peterloo Massacre- August 16th 1819

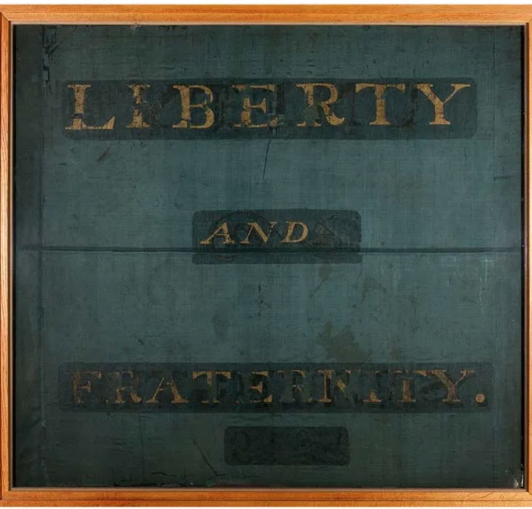
Who went to St Peter's Field, Manchester on 16th August 1819?

Around 60,000 people attended a demonstration at St Peter's Field, Manchester. They were mainly workers, possibly from the cotton industry. They also carried homemade flags for political reform. The reformers believed this would be a joyous event so brought along their children and picnics. They flocked to see Henry Drator Hunt who was the champion of the people because of his leading role in the campaign for universal suffrage.

What did the protesters want?

The people came together to influence the government for change and reform. Henry demanded the right to vote for everyone; at present, only 3% of the population could vote, they had to be male and land owners. This unfairness in the system led to these protests for political reform.





What happened to the protesters?

Henry's speech meant the government brought in re-enforcements, these professional soldiers were local businessmen sent to arrest Hunt and break up the meeting. They were very hostile towards the reformers as they had sharpened their swords, whilst lashing out on horseback as they charged at the crowds. It quickly turned into a bloodshed massacre where around 15 people were killed and approximately 600 injured. Henry Hunt was then jailed for two years with many other leader reformers.

Why was this event so shocking to many people at the time?

It was meant to be a peaceful rally with people dressed in their best clothes with passive intentions - they were not anticipating any violence. The Peterloo banner, made of blue silk, was carried by protesters from Middleton at St Peter's Field. The words 'Liberty and Fraternity' meant 'freedom and brotherhood', and were used a slogan in the French Revolution. On the other side of the banner were the words 'Unity and Strength'. These people were there for support, not for a fight.

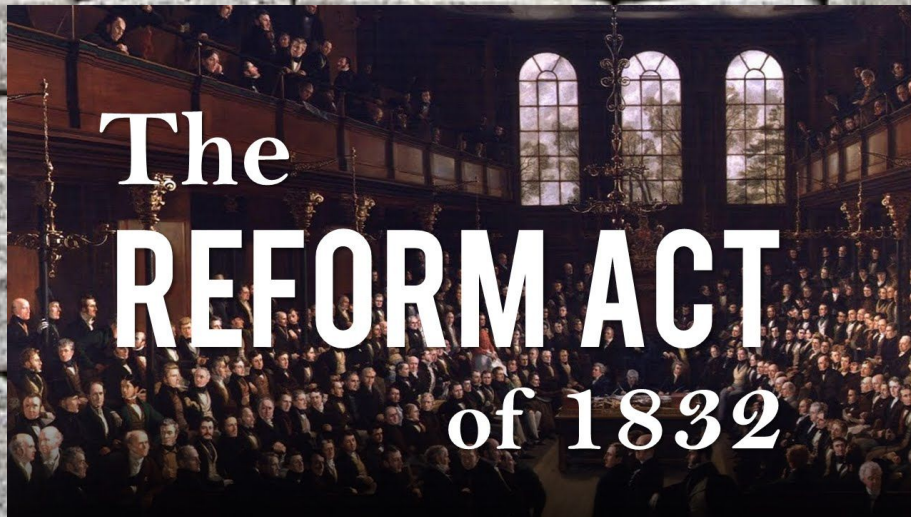
Why were the local businessmen, who served as volunteer soldiers in the Yeomanry, worried by the event?

They were in fear that the demonstration would turn into a rebellion; being wealthy, they didn't want a reform of parliament. They also didn't believe the uneducated should have the right to vote and thoroughly believed democracy was dangerous.

Why did this event come to be known as Peterloo?

Because of the amount of bloodshed, it was compared by the Press to the Battle of Waterloo: a famous battle in 1815 in which many British soldiers had fought and been killed fighting the French emperor Napoleon. Investigations were carried out into the deaths at St Peter's Field, but the soldiers were cleared of any wrong-doing.

1832 The Great Reform Act



After Peterloo, the government were committed to suppressing the reform movement. Lord Liverpool's government passed six acts, laws that stopped mass gatherings, the carrying of flags, limited circulation of cheap newspapers. Even so, Peterloo did contribute to political change, people of all classes were appalled by the bloodshed so less supported of Lord Liverpool's government.

Changes were introduced in 1832 which started to allow more people a voice in politics in Britain.

The 1832 Reform Act meant men living in towns who owned property worth more than £10 per year had the right to vote.

The franchise was extended to some middle-class men, but still excluded 6 out of 7 adult men in Britain, as well as all women. Only 8% of the population could now vote. The Great Reform Act aided the wealthy people e.g. the factory owners, the bankers, the shopkeepers and the land owners, but still gave no power to the working class and poor people.

The Chartist Movement



What role did Cuffay play in the Chartist campaigns?

He was a prominent figure in the movement and was elected as one of the leaders. He was involved in organising a rally on Kennington Common, in 1848, over 20,000 participants attended. It had to be abandoned and Cuffay decided to plan a more violent protest. He was then arrested and sentenced to be transported to Tasmania. Where he was forced to do hard labour such as building roads. In 1856 Cuffay was pardoned and released but he chose to remain in Tasmania and returned to being a tailor.

Who were the Chartists and what did they want?

They were a working-class male movement for political reform. They wanted votes for all, secret ballots, regular Parliaments and the payment of MP's.

How did they try to achieve their aims?

They took the Chartists petition to present to Parliament but were a laughing stock which then sparked rioting on the moors in protest.

Why were the Chartists unsuccessful?

They were unsuccessful because amongst the movement they had spies and Police informants so when conflict arose, the Police were ready and waiting for them.

Women's suffrage or adult suffrage?

Supporting Women's suffrage meant that women should be given the vote on the same terms as men. Pre 1918, however, this meant that a property qualification would be applied to them in the same way as men, meaning that only women who owned a certain amount of property would be able to vote. Under this system, working women would still be unable to vote.

Others supported adult suffrage. This argued that all adults, men and women, should be granted the vote without any property qualifications. Working-class campaigners demanded that this would be fairer, as otherwise only wealthy men and women would have a voice.

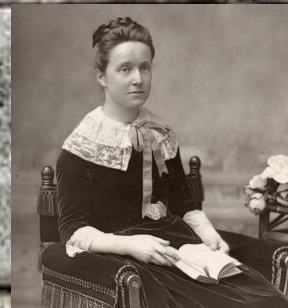
The women's suffrage movement started in the late 19th Century.

*Early female campaigners wanted equality for women and the ability to vote. They believed women who paid taxes should be represented, they wanted rights to divorce for women, and campaigned against any laws that harmed women. They also wanted improvement of conditions for working women. They used methods such as Pamphlets, petitions and publications such as *English Woman's Journal*.*

Millicent Fawcett and the NUWSS

National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies

Millicent Fawcett was the founder from a wealthy middle-class family. The vote was the means to an end: a way of improving the lives of women generally. They wanted women to have the vote under the same terms as men. They believed in women's suffrage first rather than focusing on adult suffrage. They campaigned with peaceful protest and persuasion and that continuing with peaceful tactics, such as petitions and debates in Parliament, it might eventually persuade the government that women deserved the vote. In 1913, with nearly 100,000 members the NUWSS organised a pilgrimage to London, An estimated 50,000 women reached Hyde Park on 26th July. The demonstration was entirely peaceful and was used to show that huge numbers of women supported women's suffrage.



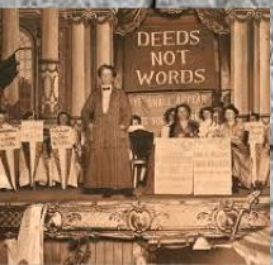


Later Female Campaigners



Emmeline Pankhurst and the WSPU

The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia. They were known as the Suffragettes and their slogan was 'deeds not words'. They felt their voice wasn't being heard and resorted to a more militant approach where they received press coverage in newspapers. They deliberately broke the law to get arrested. This included, arson, window smashing, and hunger strikes. If arrested, the women went on hunger strikes and were force fed through a tube or sent home until they regained strength and then re-arrested. They had gained sympathy for their cause, and publicity encouraging a lot of women to support their calls for votes for women. But this made the government unwilling to give in to the terrorist tactics of the Suffragettes. Their actions therefore actually made a change in the law less likely.



Radical suffragists

These women tended to be working class from the North of England and many of them were also linked to trade unions and to the new Labour Party. Part of their larger goal was to improve conditions for all working people. Because of this, they wanted adult suffrage. They helped women gain campaign experience and played a role in the increased calls for adult suffrage by striking over working conditions.



The Women's Freedom League

Founded in 1907 by three members of the WSPU, Charlotte Despard, Teresa Billington-Greig and Edith How-Martyn. They disagreed with the WSPU's aims and its tactics. They thought that the WSPU was beginning to forget the interests of working women, they also disapproved of the increasing violence of the WSPU's protests. Wanting the vote for all women and believed in adult suffrage. Octavia Lewin one of the founders took part in the illegal suffrage boycott of the government census survey by refusing to give the required information. 'No Vote, No Census.'

Final conclusions after The War effort...



How did women's suffrage campaigners responded to the outbreak of war?

A march was held in 1915 where women demanded the 'Right to Serve'. This added to the decision to create the 'Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1917.

The WAAFIC took support roles in the army, freeing up men to fight in the front lines.

Other women served in medical roles such as nurses with the Voluntary Aid Detachment of the Red Cross.

Many women took jobs in factories, producing weapons and equipment for the war.

Louisa Garrett Anderson was the niece of Millicent Fawcett and a member of the WSPU. She was involved in forming the Women's Hospital Corps (WHC), which adopted the WSPU motto 'Deeds not Words' and set up hospitals in France

Why did the government finally gave some women the vote in 1918?

Women's war service gave MPs a good excuse for changing their minds. But, it is believed the influence of campaigns led by women from 1866 onwards, had a hand in the decision.. The changes in the legal status of women and more educational opportunities meant women were more capable of undertaking the roles they did during the war.

What did women achieve in 1928?

All women over the age of 21 were finally granted the right to vote.

Did this mean that women had achieved everything they had been campaigning for, or were there still changes to fight for?

There were still changes to fight for as women wanted to gain entrance to parliament and become MP's to create a more equal representation.